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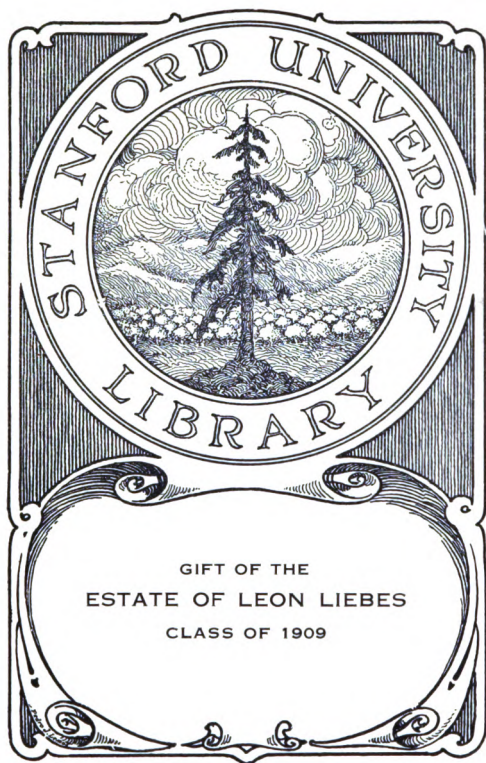
The spirit of revolt

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PHILIP GIBBS



Dear Sir,

London. 1 Jan/25.

THE SPIRIT OF REVOLT

THE SPIRIT OF REVOLT

BY

PHILIP GIBBS

AUTHOR OF "THE ROMANCE OF ~~GEORGE~~ VILLIERS"

FOURTH EDITION

METHUEN & CO. LTD.
36 ESSEX STREET W.C.
LONDON

60

823.7

C4425

First Published *September 1908*
Second Edition *January 1911*
Third and Cheaper Edition *March 1924*
Fourth Edition (Cheap Form) *1924*

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

**TO
AGNES**

THE SPIRIT OF REVOLT

I

AT a boarding-house in Guildford Street, which was only distinguished from its neighbours by the fresh green paint on the front door, and by yellow window-curtains tied up with pink sashes, there was a little scene at the breakfast-table, caused by an announcement over the tea-urn from Mrs. Birch, the landlady. The oldest lodger, who was an observant gentleman, having little else to do but observe the small details of life now that he had retired from the Civil Service, had noticed that her hand trembled as she handed him his second cup of tea, spilling a little in the saucer, to his deep annoyance. It was on the tip of his tongue to expostulate, but he caught the eye of the typist opposite who had a sharper tongue than his own, and always took the landlady's part, whether she was right or wrong. He decided to remember the grievance as one more reason for moving to the boarding-house opposite, where, he had been told, the cooking was better and the service more efficient.

Mrs. Birch made her statement at the marmalade stage of the breakfast.

Her thin worn face flushed a little, and her shrill voice had a kind of acid sweetness, concealing the querulousness which was her customary tone in the lower regions of the house where she worked off her jangled nerves on Em'ly, her maid-of-all-work. She addressed herself to the oldest lodger, but her remarks were intended for the company as a whole.

"We shall have a new member of the family to-morrow, Mr. Vinnicombe. Quite a distinguished person, as I think you'll agree, knowing the interest you take in politics and the daily papers; not that I know anything about either of them, having so much work on my hands, and I hope to the satisfaction of all my gentlemen and ladies, which I try to do my best."

Mr. Vinnicombe helped himself to a very large spoonful of marmalade.

"A new boarder is generally a new nuisance as far as I am concerned," he said.

The typist girl opposite fixed him with a pair of remarkably keen grey eyes.

"The milk of human kindness is very cheap to-day," she observed casually. "I'll trouble you for that marmalade pot, Mr. Vinnicombe."

A pale-faced and pimply young man, who was doing up a bootlace between his mouthfuls of bread and butter, chuckled below the table-cloth, and then, coming up to the horizon and taking a hurried gulp of tea, darted a quick question at Mrs. Birch.

"Who's to honour us this time?" he asked, aspirating the wrong "h."

Mrs. Birch threw him a grateful glance. She dreaded the daily duels between the typist and the oldest lodger, knowing that it would result eventually in the loss of one of her boarders.

"It is an honour, I am sure," she said. "It's nothing less than one of the Labour members which is elected to the new Parliament; and they say the King is going to open it next week, though, after all, seeing as I pray for him regularly on Sunday, I haven't the time to go and see the dear man. Mr. Richard Kelmars, he's called, and comes from Burslem, and writes a most polite letter. It's the first time I have had an M.P., though many Parsees, and I regret to say some gentlemen who left without paying what was due."

The pale-faced man, who had broken his bootlace, and was purple below the table-cloth, swearing silently at the cat on the hassock, who regarded him with placid eyes near

by, looked up and stared at the landlady as if she had announced the coming of a crocodile.

"A Labour M.P.!" he said. "Oh dear, oh lor'! I suppose he'll sit at dinner in his shirt-sleeves, and read out his own speeches at breakfast. What a rosy prospect! . . . Well, anyhow, I must set off to my cursed office."

The typist girl got up after a swift glance at the clock, and stabbed a pin through a black straw hat which she had arranged with the help of the mirror over the mahogany sideboard.

"I expect he'll be an ignoramus," she said. "They all are; and the Labour members are more prejudiced against women than any others, though some of them pretend to be on our side."

The oldest lodger put his teacup on his plate and pushed them both away.

"Mrs. Birch," he said solemnly. "I regret having to give a week's notice. As a Conservative, and if I may say so, a Christian, as well as an old Civil Servant of forty years' standing, I object to associating with anarchists and revolutionaries."

"Ha! ha!" said the pale-faced young man solemnly, and with a last gulp of tea made a bolt out of the room.

"Perhaps there will be a little marmalade for me in future," said the typist, and she also, with a last look at the clock, left the breakfast-room.

Mrs. Birch was left alone with the oldest lodger, and begged him to reconsider his decision. As for anarchists, the mere word sent cold shivers down her back, and the four-course dinner was more than he could get for the price at any other boarding-house in Bloomsbury.

Mr. Vinnicombe was relentless, but Mrs. Birch took consolation in the thought that he had given her a week's notice once a fortnight for seven years. But it jangled her nerves, and half an hour later she bullied Em'ly so spitefully that the girl, bursting into tears and throwing her apron over her head, also gave her a week's notice. As Emily did the work of three people at less than the wages of one, being a girl from the Foundling Hospital, and so dwarfed in body that she could sleep comfortably

in a chair-bed in the box-room, Mrs. Birch gave her a half-holiday—on a day to be arranged later—and so smoothed things over.

She found a little relief for her feelings with Susy Sullivan, who had the second floor back, and never got up for breakfast, being a theatrical lady. Mrs. Birch pulled back the window-curtains, and picking up some of the girl's clothes which were lying on the floor, folded them over the backs of the chairs.

"Are you awake, my dear?" she said.

A lazy little yawn sounded from the bedclothes, two arms in a white nightgown tied up with pink bows pushed them back, and Miss Susy Sullivan sat up, thrusting a tangled mass of reddish gold hair from her forehead. She had a pretty plump face, flushed after sleep, and she yawned again, opening very widely a mouth with full ripe lips, and showing an excellent set of white teeth.

"You *are* a dragon!" she said to Mrs. Birch. "Fancy waking me at this hour—after the very dickens of a day yesterday! We rehearsed until I nearly dropped. The ballet master is the biggest brute in creation. One of these days I'll jab a hat pin into his fatty degeneration of a heart."

"I'm sorry, my dear," said Mrs. Birch, touching the lace of the girl's nightgown with her thin worn fingers. A woman prematurely old, and faded in mind and body by the continual greyness of a toiling life, she found an unconscious pleasure in the plump prettiness, the high spirits, and the *abandon* of this actress girl.

"I have just had such a scene at breakfast. I told them about the M.P. that has taken the attic-rooms, and Mr. Vinnicombe jumped down my throat, which, after all, is most unreasonable, seeing I always give him the best cut off the joint. He has given me notice again."

"Oh, leave the old pig to me," said Miss Sullivan. "I've only got to show my teeth at him to make him all oil and honey—the brute. Hand me those stockings, you old dear, I may as well get up now you've woken me out

of my beauty sleep. When does the new man come in front of the footlights?"

"Do you mean Mr. Kelmarsh, the M.P.? He'll be here at eleven, my dear."

"I wonder if he's good looking. A nice man in the house would make me feel better. For a choice collection of monstrosities commend me to a London lodging-house!"

She pounced out of bed and pirouetted round the room.

"What spirits you have the first thing in the morning!" said Mrs. Birch, with a pale, wintry smile.

"What's the good of being miserable when you can be buried for thirty shillings?" said Miss Sullivan, dabbing her face with a wet sponge.

Mrs. Birch left the young lady to dress, and called up Em'ly to dust the new lodger's rooms upstairs.

An hour and a half later, Miss Sullivan in a blue dress, with her red gold hair coiled in an elaborate coiffure, sat at the piano in the breakfast-room (which was also the dining-room, and the reception-room), and tried over the choruses of a new musical comedy. She had a shrill, high-pitched voice, and played the accompaniments with a delightful disregard of false notes. But she had an enthusiastic audience of one. Em'ly was down on her knees, sweeping up the crumbs. With her bit of dirty lace, which she called a cap, cocked over one eye, and with a smudge of blacking down one cheek, she knelt with the hearth-brush beating time to the music, and a look of rapture on her face.

"That's my idea of 'Eaven, miss," she said, when Miss Sullivan had thumped out the last chord of one of the songs. "It makes me think of hangels. One of these days, p'r'aps, if what they say in church is true, I'll wear a 'evenly crown and sing like that meself."

Susy Sullivan swung round on her music stool with her legs stretched out, and laughed down the C scale.

"My! You'd look fine in a heavenly crown, Em'ly! Especially if you wore it cocked over one eye!"

Em'ly gave a dab to her piece of lace, and set it at another angle.

"Oh lor'!" she said, "I know I look a guy. I specs I'm too ugly to go to 'Eaven!"

She started up from her knees. "I say! There's a keb stopped outside. I b'lieve it's the new lodger."

"What sport!" cried Miss Sullivan. "I'll take a peep at him before I go off to that death's hole they call a theatre."

She picked up her skirts, and dancing a two-step to the window, pulled back a corner of the curtain, while Em'ly dashed out of the room in answer to a sharp call from her mistress. Miss Sullivan, after a minute's outlook, took her eyes from the peep-hole, and coming back into the room, patted her hair in front of the looking-glass over the mantelpiece.

"My word!" she said to herself. "He's quite a pretty boy. Fancy that!"

II

IN the hall there was the noise of some luggage being dumped down, and Mrs. Birch's voice rising in shrill staccatos as she ushered in her new boarder. Then Miss Sullivan, who was listening with her head on one side, heard the quiet tones of a man's voice answering in monosyllables. In a moment the girl darted to the piano and turned over a leaf of music, for the door opened and Mrs. Birch brought in the new man."

"This is the breakfast and the reception room," said Mrs. Birch. "Most of the lodgers take their meals here, but they are served in their own rooms if desired, which is no extra trouble or charge; and I always try to make my gentlemen comfortable, and all very social and pleasant, putting up with one another's little habits and prejudices, which is always so in human nature, as no doubt you will agree, Mr. Kelmarsh?"

"Quite so," said Mr. Kelmarsh. "Very nice."

He was a young man in a blue serge suit, with a red tie ; and he looked round the room gravely with keen grey eyes, which seemed very quick and alert. He had a thin, clean-shaven face with a firm, straight mouth and a well-modelled chin. His brown hair curled a little above each cheek-bone, softening a face that might have seemed hard in repose, though when he smiled his expression was amiable and boyish. He had an ascetic studious look, but his square shoulders and the poise of his head, which he held rather high, seemed to reveal a man of athletic habits. It was not in this way, however, that Susy Sullivan summed him up in her mind as she glanced sideways at him over her music sheets, which she turned over with assumed interest, while Mrs. Birch continued her solo of explanation.

"A pretty boy," she said to herself. "And quite the toff! I wonder what he thinks of me? He keeps his eyes to himself."

Mrs. Birch, however, directed the young man's eyes to her at this very moment.

"This is Miss Sullivan, our talented young actress, Mr. Kelmarsh, which is a very hard-working business, though not every one thinks so ; and I hope you'll be friends. This is Mr. Kelmarsh, Miss Susy, my dear. A member of Parliament, and I am sure I hope he'll be comfortable; though Mr. Vinnicombe is a Conservative, and, really, I don't know what politics I am myself, not having the time."

Richard Kelmarsh flushed slightly and bowed to Miss Susy Sullivan, letting his grey eyes rest for a moment on her face.

She came forward and took his hand in the friendliest way, which seemed to surprise him a little.

"Warm for the time of year, isn't it?" she said. "How do you like being an M.P.? Good sport?"

Richard Kelmarsh smiled at her. "I hardly know yet," he said. "I don't take my seat in the House until next Wednesday. But, of course, I'm keenly interested in politics." His eyes glinted a little as he looked out of the window to the glow of sunlight on the houses opposite.

"I hope I shall be able to do a little good to humanity. There is plenty of work for me."

"Oh la, la!" said Miss Susy, saucily. "You *do* take yourself seriously! I thought politics were just a game. In my opinion play-acting is the only hard work."

Richard Kelmarsch flushed uneasily. Had he made a fool of himself, and was this pretty girl laughing at him? Yes, she was pretty, he thought. He liked that reddish tinge in her hair, and her impudent blue eyes were enticing. He wished he were more sure of himself in women's society. He had lived too much with men.

The thoughts chased each other through his brain before he answered with a sign of embarrassment—

"I hope I don't take myself too seriously. But, after all, I have come up to town to do some work if I can."

"I suppose I've offended you," said Susy, as if she didn't mind very much. "I'm very free spoken—am I not, Mrs. Birch?"

Mrs. Birch thought it was due to high spirits which, being middle-aged, she liked to see among young people.

Susy picked up her bundle of songs and, trilling a bar with assumed indifference to the stranger, went to the door. Then in her best society manner she smiled sweetly at Mr. Richard Kelmarsch.

"I trust you will excuse me," she said. "I must be off to rehearsal. Do you mind?"

"Not at all," said the young man. Then he added awkwardly, "Perhaps I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again."

"Oh, too much of me!" said Miss Susy, dropping her society manner and going out of the room with a swish of her silk underskirt and a little ripple of laughter.

"Such a dear!" said Mrs. Birch to her new lodger. "Her father's a drunkard in Dublin—quite the gentleman, I believe—and won't do any work, except at intervals. She sends him half her wages regular, and always cheers me up with her pleasant ways, except when she goes on tour, which is a cruel life for any respectable girl, though I will say that Mr. Phil Darlington is over head and ears

in love with her, and others which I needn't mention any names."

Richard Kelmars had already abandoned all attempts to follow the thread of Mrs. Birch's arguments; but he answered amiably—

"Very interesting. She's pretty, certainly."

"Oh, I'm so glad you think so," said Mrs. Birch, with a touch of ecstasy in her voice. "I've said the same to Mr. Vinnicombe a hundred times, but he is a retired Civil Servant and very conservative in his tastes, as well as being most particular about the way his bacon is cooked."

She led her lodger upstairs to his own room, and while he was studying the hideous pattern of the wall-paper, wondering whether he could live with it, and reading the religious texts on the wall, which he resolved to take down at the earliest moment, on principle, being, as he said to himself in phrases familiar to his lips at the Burslem debating society, "an advanced rationalist with a hatred of superstition," Mrs. Birch gave a detailed account of the conveniences for which there was no extra charge (including a bath-room and free use of soap, which she regretted some gentlemen took in their pockets to their offices), the secret history of her own life, and a study of her lodgers' characteristics.

The new boarder listened to her patiently, eager to learn even from a landlady some of the social customs of London, which was as yet an unknown world to him. He made out that Mrs. Birch had been twice married, though he could not understand whether it was "her first" who had shot himself after being dismissed from his place as a gentleman's servant, or whether it was her second who was a commercial traveller in Bibles and unhappily addicted to drink and breaking china in leisure hours, though the best of men. It might have been the other way about. He also learned that the last inhabitant of the rooms he had now taken was a single lady who had come with two trunks which, when she was carried out by the police, were found to contain nothing but empty bottles of Scotch whisky. As regards the present boarders, it seemed that

in addition to Mr. Vinnicombe, the oldest lodger, and Miss Sullivan, whom he had already met, there were two gentlemen who were something in the city—Mr. Pond and Mr. Morley; Miss Eunice Johnston, a lady typist, and a dear thing, though short-tempered and a believer in woman's rights; Mr. Henderson, an elderly gentleman who worked at the British Museum, and Miss Ringwood, a spinster lady of independent means and the author of "The Bloody Trail," and other stories of adventure which Em'ly read while she was cleaning the boots and washing up.

"And I wish she didn't," said Mrs. Birch, "as it makes her so absent-minded that she once put the blacking on the teapot by mistake."

There was also Mr. Phil Darlington, the actor, who was at present away on tour with the "Jolly Jack" company.

Having delivered herself of this information, and with renewed hopes for his future comfort and happiness, Mrs. Birch left her new lodger alone.

He smiled to himself when she had gone, and then stood, thoughtfully, looking round the bed-sitting-room which was to be his home and workshop for at least some months.

"How horribly ugly and dreary!" he said aloud. Then he walked swiftly to the mantelpiece and took down the three golden texts on polished black cards, and the picture in an oak frame which represented a little girl looking up at a grandfather clock and saying, "What does it say?" He rummaged in one of his boxes and pulled out some framed sketches, hanging them up on the nails formerly used by the texts. One was a pencil drawing of an elderly man with a stern rugged face, the profile of which seemed reproduced more delicately in the young man who had put it above the mantelpiece. Another sketch was of a woman's face, a stout woman of middle age, with placid eyes. He spent half an hour tacking up other sketches, boldly and effectively drawn in pencil and charcoal, and then sitting in his shirt-sleeves at the deal table covered with a red cloth stained with many blots of ink, he hurried through a letter.

"MY DEAREST MOTHER," he wrote.

"Here I am in the boarding-house recommended by my friend. It seems comfortable, but the wall-paper I am sure will give me bad dreams. Outside this window is London. I can hear the dull roar of the traffic, and the murmur of its millions. At present it is an unexplored world to me, and I am eager to plunge into its seething masses of humanity and to get at the heart of them. I realize with something like awe that in a few days I shall take my place in the House of Commons as a representative of the people, as one of those who will guide their destinies, for good or evil. In London one feels so small, so insignificant, that I already stand appalled at the audacity of my ambition and at the weight of my responsibilities. But if one man's courage and good sense can do something I will help forward the cause of liberty and social happiness, fighting always against class tyranny and injustice. I am a democrat in blood and bone, and if I have any gifts they shall be used in the service of the working people. I hear you sigh, and see you shake your dear head. You have always been afraid of my 'wild opinions.' They scare you. To my old-fashioned dad they seem blasphemous and revolutionary. Yet you are proud of me. You were proud when Burslem went wild over the injustice of my employers and carried me to the top of the poll. One of these days perhaps both of you will believe in the righteousness of my principles. For I am on the side of right and truth, and a hater of social wrong-doing and social shams. Well, well, I will not write my confession of faith, which you know already. London calls to me. I can hear its mighty heart beating. My spirit is thrilled by the mystery and the greatness of it, by its beauty and its ugliness. I must get out into the streets and plunge into the crowds.

"I know you are praying for me. I do not pray now, but your love is a strength to me and I send you my own love, to you and to dad, from a full heart.

"Your son,

"RICHARD"

"P.S.—The landlady is a good sort, worn and worried

by the deadly struggle for life which is the result of the eternal warfare between class and class. She has a curious habit of irrelevance in conversation which makes my brain whirl. I have made the acquaintance of one of my fellow-boarders, a pretty actress girl who became quite familiar at the end of five minutes or less. Londoners are utterly different from Midland folk. I shall have lots to write about."

III

THAT evening Richard Kelmarsh went to dinner at the National Liberal Club with Alf Simpkins, the Labour member for Bow. He was astonished by the showy magnificence of its marble halls and stairways, and he was abashed inwardly—though outwardly he behaved with coolness and quietude—by the little batches of well-dressed men at the dinner-tables, and it was with something like a shock that he saw his host in evening dress. In Burslem he had always looked upon a white shirt-front as a symbol of class distinction, the emblem of capitalists and aristocrats. Yet Alf Simpkins talked the politics of the Labour Party in the old familiar phrases that had been on Richard's own lips for two years past, unconscious that to his young friend and colleague this ostentatious display of linen was an affront. The table etiquette was also a cause of embarrassment to the M.P. for Burslem. He was puzzled by the multiplicity of knives and forks, and blushed deeply when he found that he had used his fish fork for an *entrée*. Gradually, however, as he became accustomed to his surroundings he felt more at ease with himself and could watch the men about him with less self-consciousness.

When he walked into the smoking-room with Simpkins he saw two men turn as he passed, and overheard his name

mentioned. Simpkins also heard and gave a gruff laugh.

"These Liberal fellers always stare at a new Labour man. They hate us like poison, but they have a 'ealthy respect for us."

Simpkins gave his guest some coffee and a cigarette, and Richard Kelmarsh listened inattentively to the long monologue of his host on the coming session and the tactics of the Labour group. He was absorbed by the study of the men about him. He was gradually impressed by their general shabbiness. Even some of those in evening dress, who at first had abashed him by the splendour of their shirt-fronts, appeared on closer inspection to have slept in them. Some of the older ones, with hair and beards that seemed to need a brush, were remarkably slovenly, and had a habit of spilling coffee down their waistcoats. Here and there was a spruce man with clean-shaven face and a well-ironed shirt, but he was exceptional. Among the grey-beards were a number of boyish fellows who smoked cigarettes incessantly, and talked rather loudly. They hardly seemed like the representatives of Liberalism.

"Who are they?" he said to Simpkins.

"Oh them?" said Simpkins, carelessly. "Journalist fellers. News-scamengers. The parasites of public men, I call them. Still, I suppose we couldn't do without them. They advertise us."

Kelmarsh was rather relieved to find that most of the men round him had baggy trousers and shiny black coats. He had had an exaggerated idea of London smartness, and he could not afford to dress well himself. Some of the faces, too, were interesting, but he thought that too many of them looked like Nonconformist ministers. The room was full of smoke, and the noise of many voices. What were they all talking about? He would have liked to overhear some of the conversation instead of having to pay a half-attention to Simpkins, who was a conceited ignorant man. He overheard stray sentences—about a new novel by Hall Caine, the religious revival in Wales, "the wife and kids," the best brands of whisky, a "scoop" in the "Daily Mail," the colliery disaster at Sunderland, and "the extraordinary thing that that ignorant old hunx should be

the editor of a great London journal." He did not hear a word of politics. Yet he supposed that some of these men at least were members of Parliament.

Kelmarsh left the Club with a curious feeling of annoyance. He was annoyed first of all with the stronghold of Liberalism. "Liberalism!" he said to himself. "What a farce!" It is only another name for the Conservative middle class. There was more true liberalism in the bare ugly room of the working-men's debating society in Burslem than in those marble halls, with obsequious waiters, and men in shabby evening dress. There was also in his mind, though he tried to hide it from himself, a sense of disappointment. He had expected to make a little sensation when he appeared for the first time among the men who would be his political friends and enemies when he should take his seat in the House. It had been a keen fight in Burslem, and his platform oratory had startled the Potteries. But he had passed almost unnoticed, and not a soul had interrupted Simpkin's monologues to ask for an introduction to him.

Kelmarsh walked into Trafalgar Square and on to Piccadilly, glad of the fresh breeze which fanned his hot forehead. He was a little nervous of the swirling traffic, but the sight of the cabs and carriages flashing by, and of the endless line of omnibuses, of the crowded pavements, of the lights in the restaurants, and the passing glimpses he had into the vestibules of great hotels where men and women lounged in evening dress, began to intoxicate his senses with a strange exhilaration. He moralized to himself at every step—his character was easily tempted to moral reflection—seeing before him the glaring contrasts between luxury and poverty, the object-lessons of aristocratic decadence and the slavery of the masses which had been the theme of so many of his speeches and pamphlets during the last two years of his life in Burslem.

He saw a parade of women with faces ghastly white with powder and with eyes horribly brilliant. Two of them were talking with shrill laughter to three drunken boys in opera hats and evening dress. At the corner of Piccadilly Circus a young girl in a neat dress came and put

her hand upon his arm and spoke to him in a quiet friendly voice. He raised his hat, startled for a moment, and then with a low exclamation of, "My poor girl!" hurried on, shuddering a little.

"Babylon!" he said to himself. "Babylon!" And then—"There is lots to do—so many things to put right."

As he passed up Shaftesbury Avenue, a human scarecrow, holding his rags together with claw-like hands, slunk out of the dark entry and padded noiselessly towards him.

"Spare me something for Christ's sake," he said, thrusting a hairy and filthy face, out of which two eyes gleamed savagely, at Richard Kelmarsh.

Kelmarsh gave him sixpence, though afterwards he reproached himself for yielding to indiscriminate charity which did not fit in with his scheme of things.

The man seized it, and staring at the coin under the light of a gas lamp, put it in his mouth and shuffled off without a word.

"This is London!" thought Kelmarsh. "Luxury and starvation. Sweated labour and destitution. Beauty and wealth in the highways, filth and vice in back streets."

He returned to the boarding-house in Guildford Street, and the door was opened by Em'ly, who had been asleep on a chair in the hall with a bit of lace on her touzled hair hanging over one ear.

"I am sorry to be so late," said Kelmarsh. "I forgot to ask for a latch-key."

"Oh, that's all right," said Em'ly. "You wakened me up at the nick of time. I dreamt I was being eaten up by a tiger."

"Good heavens!" said Kelmarsh, smiling at the queer stunted little creature who blinked at him with sleepy eyes. "What a nasty kind of dream!"

"Oh, it's nothink to some-I 'ave," said Em'ly. "A favourite of mine is being squashed under a steam-roller. That's somethink awful, I can tell you."

Kelmarsh took a candle from the hall-table and went upstairs with a "good night."

"'Ere," said Em'ly, calling after him, "if you want yer

boots cleaned don't forget to put 'em outside. Some of the gentlemen are a fair noosance that way, and, of course, they expect the boots to be cleaned whether they put 'em out or not."

"I won't forget," said Kelmarsh. He felt a pity for this poor drudge who waited up so late, and yet must be cleaning boots in the early morning.

As he was going into his room, a bedroom door opposite his own opened suddenly, and a bare, plump arm threw a pair of shoes out. He made an ejaculation, startled by the sudden clatter.

"Oh lor'!" said a voice. "I'm sorry."

Then the door opened wider, and Kelmarsh saw Miss Susy Sullivan standing in her bodice and petticoat. She was quite unembarrassed, and gave him a friendly smile.

"Been round the town?" she said.

"Yes," said Kelmarsh. "Good night."

"And pleasant dreams," said Miss Sullivan. She giggled at him, and then shut her door with a little bang.

IV

RICHARD KELMARSH, Labour member for Burslem, was a young man who had some qualities promising success. For as Miss Susy Sullivan had observed at their first meeting he took himself seriously. That was the inevitable result of his education and previous environment. His father and mother were Quakers of good stock, and they had brought up their only child with piety and love, cherishing him as a gift of God. In his early years he had been in extreme danger of becoming a prig and a dangerous egoist, for at the Quakers' school in Burslem he took the prize for Scripture every year without a break, and at thirteen years of age was the teacher of the largest class in the Sunday school. His

other abilities, too, seemed dazzling to his fellow-scholars, and were the pride of his schoolmaster. Being an only child in a quiet home he was an indefatigable reader. Science and history were his favourite subjects, and though in the former branch of study he was chiefly interested in the pseudo-science of such writers as Jules Verne, and his English imitators, in risky and valueless chemical experiments, such as most healthy boys rejoice in, he made real and rapid progress in historical knowledge. Fascinated at first with the novels of Scott, Dumas, and Harrison Ainsworth, he went from fiction to fact, and found truth more exciting than pure imagination. On his fifteenth birthday his father gave him John Richard Greene's "Short History of the English People," and he lived with it by day and slept with it under his pillow by night. Then as the years passed, he read Macaulay and Froude, Hume and Carlyle. His father, who was a watch-maker by trade, and "no scholar" (though a man of shrewd intelligence and strong character), did not guess that in the volumes of Hume and Huxley there were explosives more dangerous than those which had wrecked the back-shed during one of his boy's experiments, and that they would undermine all the simple Bible teaching and the very foundations of faith upon which young Richard's early character had been built. The boy read Huxley's essays in unbelief, and Matthew Arnold's "Literature and Dogma" secretly in his room, with burning eyes and throbbing pulse. Page by page they blotted out the lessons learnt in the Sunday school and in his parents' parlour, and on one evening, at seventeen years of age, he went downstairs shivering with excitement, but outwardly cold and calm, and proclaimed to his father and mother that he no longer believed in God. Had he fired a pistol at their heads he could not have wounded them more horribly. They thought him delirious at first, but when he gave reasons for the overthrow of his early faith, his excitement finding a vent in quick and passionate words which to his mother were so many sharp swords stabbing at her heart, they saw that this was no passing fever. It was an evening which none of them would ever forget.

Late into the night they listened to the revelation of his complete agnosticism, the crude and bitter agnosticism of a clever youth in whom the well-springs of faith have been dried up. His mother wept at times, and the boy himself was moved to tears, but the father, with a stern, grave face, tried to answer his arguments by appeal to the Scriptures. It was of no avail. When the morning light crept through the window-blinds, Richard, pale and haggard, still held to his new convictions, and at last his father got up and ordered him sternly to bed.

"The devil has poisoned your brain and heart," he said. "May God have mercy on your soul."

The mother kissed him on the forehead with cold lips, and at that moment the boy wished passionately that he had not eaten of the forbidden fruit.

It was the beginning of an estrangement with his father which ended in Richard taking lodgings in Burslem, to the great grief of his mother. During the intervening years and afterwards he advanced steadily upon the path of what he called free-thought, and religious agnosticism changed into the materialism of the crudest kind, interrupted only by sudden emotions of a vague spirituality which startled him into momentary doubts. At this time he began his business career. At school he had shown a marked talent for drawing, and afterwards his only relaxation from reading was in sketching. The beauty of form and colour appealed to him irresistibly. Somewhere in the line of his Quaker ancestors, there must have been a man or woman with an artistic temperament which had now worked out in this young Burslem man by the unknown laws of heredity. He found an almost passionate delight in sketching in water-colour, and before the final separation from his father's house, he joined the Burslem Art School and won the first prize for design. This attracted the notice of the manager of the largest factory in the Potteries, and he was offered a position as an apprentice-designer at sixteen shillings a week. He accepted with joy. It was an offer of independence and a career.

For five years he worked steadily, and his taste and technique became so valuable to his employers that he

was promoted to be a junior designer at a salary of three guineas a week. In Burslem that was almost affluence for a young man of his age, and he became of some account in the town. But his reputation at the factory was endangered by the occupation of his spare hours. All this time his character was developing upon lines which the Quaker community in Burslem denounced as devil's doctrine. His imagination was caught on fire by the history and literature of the French Revolution. He read Rousseau's "Contrat Social," the witty blasphemies of Voltaire, the destructive science of D'Alembert, the cynical philosophy of Diderot, and he emerged from this course of reading with violent revolutionary ideals and with a burning interest in modern politics and sociology.

Under the influence of a colleague at the factory—a young man named Fred Wickham—he studied modern socialists from Tolstoy down to H. G. Wells, the economists from Marx to Belfort Bax, and the philosophy of Ibsen and Nordau.

He was put up by the same friend as a member of the Burslem Democratic Debating Society, and for some time listened at the evening meetings, diffident of his own powers of speech, but deeply stirred by the untrained eloquence of some of these craftsmen and clerks. Then one evening, during a debate on Capital and Labour, he sprang to his feet and astonished his audience as well as himself by a torrent of words and flaming rhetoric. His mobile face and keen sensitive eyes were illuminated with excitement. Forgetting his self-consciousness, and thinking only of the thoughts worked out through many evenings of silent study, of revolt against the teaching of his early life and of fretfulness from thwarted impulses, he found a new joy in self-expression, and when he sat down amidst the almost wild cheering of his audience, he discovered that he possessed the gift of speech.

That most fatal gift gave a new turn to his career. He became the leading spirit of the democratic club, and his superior culture, as well as a certain magnetism of personality, lifted him above his fellows. He was put up to speak at other political clubs and societies in Burslem,

and addressed out-door meetings of working men on such subjects as Liberty and Social Evolution, until he established for himself a reputation among Conservative and church-going classes as the wildest and most dangerous spirit in the Potteries.

During the municipal elections he made a violent attack upon some of the leading members of the town council, whom he accused of corruption. This audacity cost him his place. He was summoned before the Directors of the factory, and asked to withdraw certain words which had given the deepest offence to the out-going mayor, who happened to be the brother-in-law of the chief partner. He refused with cool pride, and repeated his charges in more direct and forcible language, the result being that at the end of a stormy interview he found himself dismissed with the offer of a month's wages, which he declined to accept.

A wild scene took place at the democratic club that evening when he put his case before the members. His denunciations of class tyranny and the muzzling of free speech in the interests of commercial dishonesty were applauded to the echo, and speaker after speaker rose to proclaim him a martyr to the sacred cause of liberty.

His case was taken up by many of the working-men's clubs and trade unions in Burslem, and open-air meetings were held to protest against the dismissal of Richard Kelmarsh for the honest expression of his opinions. A deputation waited upon his late employers, and were answered contemptuously. The local papers wrote leading articles on the subject, condemning or defending Kelmarsh according to their political colours, and his speeches were quoted at length. Finally, when the Liberal Government went to the country, Kelmarsh was almost unanimously adopted by the working-men's clubs in Burslem and by the central committee of the Labour Party as their candidate. It was a three-cornered election. The ex-mayor was the Liberal candidate, and the son of his late employer at the factory stood for the Conservative interest. A young man fresh from Oxford, and utterly lacking in political knowledge and the power of holding a popular

audience, the latter was no match for Kelmarsh, who had both knowledge and oratory. Flinging himself into the fight with deadly earnestness, exhilarated by the thought that he was a representative of the masses against the classes, he gathered round him all the revolutionary spirits in Burslem, and fired them with a new enthusiasm for old catch-words. This boyish fellow, with the thin, clean-shaven face and brilliant eyes, had a facility for words and phrases which called out all the political passion and prejudice of a working-class mob. They made a hero of him, and the wives and daughters of his supporters were fascinated by his personality. Exciting scenes took place in the town, and a crowd of roughs, factory hands and artisans, broke up a meeting of the Conservative candidate and smashed the furniture. The police warned Kelmarsh to moderate his language, which conduced to a breach of the peace; but he was intoxicated with the wine of ambition and youth, and his speeches still further excited the youngest and wildest spirits among the working men, though this class was by no means wholly with him, on account of his free thinking and extreme radical views.

On the day of the poll he was carried shoulder high to the election rooms, and in the evening of the day of tumult he stood on a balcony facing a seething mass of men who yelled themselves hoarse in triumph. The only thing that marred this red-letter day in his life was the political opposition of his father, who voted against him, and actually spoke on the platform of the Conservative candidate against the political propaganda of his own son.

Out of the Labour party funds he was to be allowed an income of £150 a year while he remained in Parliament. It was a poor wage upon which to support himself in his new life in London, but he hoped to increase it by writing and by continuing his work as a designer, if he could get attached to a London firm.

So he set out for the capital before the opening of a new Parliament in which he had gained a seat, and his spirit was thrilled with the thought of the work that lay

to his hand. He had the egotism of youth, but also the unselfishness of youth. His ambitions were not mercenary, nor centred in self. Having abandoned the faith of his fathers, he had made a god of democracy, and his creed was summed up in the single phrase: The Good of the People.

He had courage and resolution, but some fears and misgivings. In his secret heart he quaked a little at the thought of the vastness of London, where the problems of life were more complex than those in Burslem. He wondered whether he could hold his own with men of broader experience and wider culture, and higher refinement. And at times, the thought of women filled him with strange timidity and wistfulness. In Burslem the only woman who had entered close into the circle of his life was his mother, whom he loved with a deep reverence. At times he would yearn for a woman's companionship, desiring those confidences and that tenderness of intellectual intimacy which do not belong to the most perfect friendship between man and man. Indeed, he had no real friend even among men, no one to whom he could open the secrets of his heart. Having spent his early years very much alone, he had a reserve and shyness of character not apparent to those who heard him speak in public with audacious eloquence. In this way he had a dual nature, for while he spoke and worked among men mostly older than himself with an air of *camaraderie*, he was always encircled by invisible walls within which his spirit moved in solitude.

So he came to the lodging-house in London like a stranger in a new world, certain of meeting new experiences, and in spite of an intellectual courage and resolution, shrinking a little from the adventures that lay before him, and from the people whose lives would help to shape his own.

V

KELMARSH'S shyness of strangers tempted him to take his meals in his own room "which," as Mrs. Birch had explained with her rather freezing smile, "is no extra trouble or charge," but he decided against this desire for privacy, first, because it *was* an extra trouble to the poor drudge, Em'ly, who would have to climb four flights of stairs with his tray, and also because humanity, as exhibited in a London boarding-house, would certainly give him a new knowledge of character.

His first meals with his fellow-boarders were not altogether pleasant. Mrs. Birch put him on the right-hand side of the tea-urn, and he found her method of conversation peculiarly irritating. She rang the changes on the weather, mixed up with reminiscences of her past life, and with lodging-house philosophy, in sentences without syntax and with a remarkable confusion of ideas.

"I always find," she said, "that a south-west wind is the worst for smuts, which reminds me that my first husband was always low-spirited when it blew east, and would keep his windows open though I told him time and again that it meant sudden death, and it came true, with prussic acid, which my lodgers will bear me out. I am always most particular about airing the beds, and spring cleaning, uncomfortable as it is for gentlemen, must be done thoroughly once a year from top to bottom, and I am sure, the worry I have with Em'ly, who will have a cup of tea in the middle of the morning, turns my hair grey at the thought of it."

Kelmarsh was uncomfortably aware that the other boarders watched him curiously as if he were some strange animal with interesting habits. He had the misfortune to upset his coffee cup and it seemed to give exquisite amusement to Mr. Pond, the pimply young man, who was "something in the city," and sniggered as Mrs. Birch, with profuse assurances that it didn't matter in the least, ladled the pool of coffee into the slop basin, while Kelmarsh, inwardly cursing his clumsiness, which made him look like an ill-bred lout, murmured his apologies.

In the middle of breakfast, Mr. Vinnicombe, the retired Civil Servant, who had been glaring fiercely at Kelmarsh as though he feared he might snatch the marmalade pot which the old gentleman kept close to his plate, suddenly put a question to him in the tone of a clergyman catechizing a bad boy.

"Do you not think, sir," he said, "that the evils of the present age are largely due to the greed and laziness of the lower classes?"

Kelmarsh was startled. The remark followed one by Mrs. Birch about the importance of wearing cork soles inside one's boots in damp weather, which reminded her that the police had taken to wearing cork soles outside their boots on account of burglars.

"No," he said, flushing a little as he saw that the boarders had stopped eating their bacon, in expectation of his answer to the preposterous old gentleman. "I am convinced that the upper classes have the monopoly of greed and laziness."

"Good God, sir!" said Mr. Vinnicombe, laying down his knife. "You amaze me!"

The typist girl opposite Mr. Vinnicombe, previously introduced to Kelmarsh as Miss Eunice Johnston, smiled at him with grey eyes, which he realized gave a certain beauty of expression to a rather plain and pale face.

"I agree with you," she said. "The upper and middle classes are rotten to the core. The only remedy is votes for women."

"Votes for fiddlesticks!" said Mr. Vinnicombe.

Miss Eunice Johnston ignored the old gentleman, and fixed Kelmarsh with a serious and rather wistful gaze.

"Are you on our side?" she said.

"Which side?" said Kelmarsh, a little confused by the sudden attack.

"On the side of women's enfranchisement," said Miss Johnston.

"I have hardly made up my mind," said Kelmarsh. "I have so little experience of women's character and problems. But, theoretically, I think they have a right to vote. Certainly I am on the side of liberty, for women as

well as for men, but, possibly their sphere of work and influence should be different."

"Oh, that is prejudice!" said Miss Johnston, with a note of excitement in her voice. "When will men look at this question honestly and without superstition?"

"I try to look at everything honestly," said Kelmarsh.

Miss Johnston studied his face, and it seemed to satisfy her, for her expression of hostility softened.

"I believe you do," she said. She opened a little reticule lying on her lap, and pulled out a number of pamphlets, which she pushed over to Kelmarsh. "Will you oblige me by reading these?" she said.

Kelmarsh promised to study them. He was interested in this pale girl who seemed always to be restraining a fretfulness against her environment. She rose from the table and put on her hat, before going to her office.

"Will you come to one of our meetings at the Caxton Hall? There is a big one coming on. All the leaders are going to speak. I can get you a platform ticket, as you are a member of Parliament."

"Oh, thanks," said Kelmarsh, "I should like to come. But I would prefer the back of the hall."

After breakfast Mr. Vinnicombe took Kelmarsh on one side.

"I warn you against that young woman," he said. "She is most dangerous. I hardly feel safe with her myself."

Kelmarsh was a little alarmed. He wondered for a moment whether Miss Johnston were a woman with a perverted moral sense.

"Why doesn't she marry and have babies?" said Mr. Vinnicombe, looking at Kelmarsh as though he might account for the fact. "These women who compete with men in business are nothing but harpies—harpies, sir. Their outcry for votes is nothing but the desire to reduce men to the level of helots."

Kelmarsh smiled, and did not argue with the old gentleman. Mr. Vinnicombe then tapped him on the arm with his pince-nez.

"I understand," he said, "that you are a Labour

member. I think I ought to tell you at once that I am a retired Civil Servant, of forty years' standing. Naturally, therefore, our political views are diametrically opposed, but I trust that neither of us will forget the etiquette of gentlemen, and launch into distressing quarrels. If ever you want a quiet smoke and chat my room is at your service. I am something of a raconteur."

Kelmarsh made a secret vow that he would avoid Mr. Vinnicombe's room like the plague, but he answered with sufficient politeness.

There were two other boarders in the house who interested him as quaint and unusual characters. These were Miss Ringwood and Mr. Henderson, who were both in the literary line of business.

Miss Ringwood was a little lady of about fifty, who still had something of the simplicity and sweetness of girlhood in her face. Her eyes were wonderfully blue and bright, and her short hair, of a pale gold colour, in which there was a glint of silver, curled boyishly. She was full of quiet merriment, and had a delightful smile. Kelmarsh found her at times embarrassingly free in her speech, but there was no suggestion of intentional impropriety in her manner. She asked him into her room one day, which he found a bright and cheerful little chamber, furnished as a bed-sitting-room. The bed, for which she apologized—it was just as good as a sofa, she said, when she had friends to tea—was a snow-white couch with curtains.

"I should have preferred a double bed," she said, with just a little wistfulness in her smile. "But I shall never want one now. The dreams I used to have as a girl of a handsome husband and six beautiful babies, have disappeared like other dreams, leaving me a lonely old maid with no one to love. My dear," she went on, putting her hand on Kelmarsh's arm, "don't be too slow in making a love-nest for yourself. It is the only thing worth living for."

She showed him the books she had written, dozens of small paper-covered booklets, with tremendous scenes of adventure in red, blue, and yellow on the front, and all signed "Dick Dandy."

"That is my pen-name," she said with a touch of pride. "I dare say you know it? I have written scores of stories for boys. I think my dear mother made a mistake. I ought to have been a boy—I am so fond of pirates and smugglers and highwaymen, and runaway engines, and heroic signalmen, and Red Indians." She gave him a copy of "The Bloody Trail," inscribed, "With the author's compliments," in a thin, old-fashioned handwriting. "That is the most successful thing I have done. It has gone through fifteen editions—but I was only paid £10 for it."

Kelmarsh found that Miss Ringwood and Em'ly were warm friends and comrades. The poor drudge was the most enthusiastic admirer of the little lady's genius, and read each of her works as it came hot from the press in Red Lion Court, with an excitement that was disastrous to her mistress's crockery. And whenever Mrs. Birch's jangled nerves got the better of her temper, or when any of the boarders bullied her for faults of omission or commission, Em'ly would sneak upstairs to Miss Ringwood's room for consolation and good cheer. The little lady's merriment was the warmest sunshine of her life, and Kelmarsh, who had been invited to afternoon tea with the author of "The Bloody Trail," once found the "general" wriggling on the floor with the corner of a cushion stuffed in her mouth, and purple in the face with suppressed laughter, while Miss Ringwood gave imitations of the boarders at the breakfast-table.

Mr. Henderson, the other literary light of the boarding-house in Bloomsbury, was one of that strange company of students who haunt the British Museum. For twenty years he had taken his seat in the reading room every day save Sunday, except for an interregnum when the place was being redecorated. These were days of gloom and tragedy to him; and Dante in exile could not have been more mournful. Although the reading-room was closed to him, he still passed each day in the Museum, and ate his usual lunch of sandwiches with the mummies in the Egyptian room. People wondered what work he did, for he had never produced a printed book, though he read

papers once a fortnight before a little society of book-lovers, with a room in Bury street. It seemed that he had private means sufficient to keep him in respectable poverty, and he confided the secret of his life to Richard Kelmarsh.

Kelmarsh had been drawn by a kind of pity towards this little man in the skull-cap, with his parchment-like skin, and pale watery eyes, and with a shrinking timidity of manner. Occasionally, when he ventured down into the general room, which was not often, he would sit very silent at table, seeming to be entirely self-absorbed. But now and then, when Mr. Vinnicombe, the oldest lodger, ventured out of his depth on some subject of history or literature, which he did constantly in dogmatic tones, Mr. Henderson would, with extreme modesty, venture to correct him on a matter of fact, instantly shrinking again into his shell.

One morning he stopped Kelmarsh on the landing, and begged the favour of his company in his "den," as he called it. Upon entering the room, Kelmarsh found it crowded with old books from floor to ceiling, and littered with papers. Indeed, every chair except the old gentleman's swing chair before a knee-hole desk, was laden with books, and piles of them were stacked against the wall. Dust lay thick on them, so that Kelmarsh might have written his name in it.

Mr. Henderson began his conversation with Kelmarsh by some preliminary remarks about the endless feast of knowledge, and his pale eyes gleamed with pleasure when Kelmarsh told him something about his own student days as a lonely young man in Burslem.

"Ah," said Mr. Henderson, looking at him rather wistfully. "I had bright eyes like you once, and a heart filled with high ambition. But knowledge is a stern task-mistress, and she repays devotion with few worldly favours. I am a withered thing, and young people like yourself pity me. But I do not repine, because I am an old and tattered volume. Perhaps my contents are as valuable as some other old books which find their way into the tuppenny box of the second-hand dealer."

He chuckled a little at his bookish simile. It seemed

to him rather happy and imaginative. He was surprised at his own wit.

Then he confided to Kelmarsh, who found something curiously pathetic in this devotee of learning, who lived a hermit life among London's millions, that for twenty years he had been working at a great scheme for the co-ordination of knowledge. He had amassed thousands of notes and references, and one day, if he lived long enough, he would collect them and condense them into a volume which would be of priceless value to humanity. Kelmarsh could not get a clear idea of his scheme. It seemed to him something in the nature of a guide and catalogue to the whole Empire of books, a method of obtaining information as to the authorities in any branch of knowledge. Mr. Henderson lost himself in the vastness of his subject, which he illustrated with an amazing number of references to Egyptology, Greek and Latin literature, ecclesiastical history, and other fields of research beyond the ken of the Labour member for Burslem.

When Kelmarsh took leave of him, Mr. Henderson held his hand for a moment, as though loath to let it go.

"Come and see me sometimes," he said; "I have lived too lonely a life, and a little conversation with a young man of your intelligence cheers me wonderfully."

He made a few passing comments about his fellow-boarders, chuckling a little about the dogmatism of Mr. Vinnicombe.

"He is not so careful as he should be about his authorities. As old Dr. Jowett used to say to me, 'Always verify your references.'"

Then he spoke of Miss Ringwood, and Kelmarsh fancied he detected something like a blush on his white parchment-like face.

"A charming lady," he said, "and wonderfully kind. Do not mention it," he added in a half whisper, "but she will insist on mending my socks, and—er—underlinen. It is a little embarrassing to a man of my temperament, but she arranged it privately with Mrs. Birch, and I only discovered it through the indiscretion of Emily, the servant-maid."

He seemed a little alarmed at what had slipped from his tongue.

"I beg of you," he said hurriedly, "not to mention this."

Kelmarsh gave his solemn assurance that he would regard it in the strictest confidence, but when he went back to his own room, he thought with a smiling emotion of this little touch of romance in the lives of two lonely people.

VI

THE brief acquaintance Kelmarsh had made with Miss Susy Sullivan was not renewed for some days, as the young lady's habits of life were somewhat different from those of the other boarders. She always took breakfast in bed, and going out about one o'clock did not return until late in the evening. But he met her one afternoon in Shaftesbury Avenue, and stopping him with a "Hullo!" she said amiably that if he had nothing better to do he might go shopping with her and carry her parcels. He hesitated in an embarrassed way, secretly nervous of a girl in a light-blue dress short enough to reveal open-work stockings with patent shoes, and in a large limp straw hat with blue ribbon dangling behind.

"Oh, all right," she said, "don't mind me if you're busy," and with a little toss of the head marched on.

This covered him with confusion. Unused to the society of women, he was seized with remorse for a possible breach of good manners and he strode after her, with an apology.

"I should be delighted to carry your parcels."

"Good boy," said Miss Sullivan. "That's nice of you."

She explained that she had the afternoon off owing to the illness of the ballet master, Mr. Simonetti—"a dirty

little Italian Jew, who," she said, "gets blind regularly once a fortnight and calls it indigestion." She added that if he were very nice to her indeed she would invite him to tea at Harrod's and pay for it herself, as she wasn't like some girls who sponge upon every male thing that comes their way.

Kelmarsh found something piquant and amusing in the girl's personality and lively slang. It was outside his previous experience, and as he walked by her side, glancing down at her now and again, the glint in her gold red hair, the sauciness of her profile with its *retroussé* nose and dimpled chin, the lines of her plump soft neck, appealed to his artistic sense as well as to other instincts of which he was not fully conscious. He found, too, a certain spirit of adventure in the free-and-easy conversation with a girl who was a complete stranger to him. He discovered, rather to his surprise, that his first embarrassment quickly disappeared, and it pleased him to see that she thought some of his remarks diverting. Before long they were engaged in a rattle of small talk, and Kelmarsh exerted himself to keep pace with her vivacity.

By the time they had been in and out of three omnibuses and four shops between Charing Cross and Knightsbridge she had given him a fairly full account of her private and professional career. Her father, it seemed, was an Irish gentleman who having at some remote period been "frightfully rich" was now reduced to the necessity of being the keeper of the stage door of the Theatre Royal, Dublin, at a salary of twenty-five shillings a week.

"Unfortunately," said Miss Sullivan, with candour, "he suffers from the same complaint as Mr. Simonetti, which is a failing of the artistic temperament."

She made a point of sending him half her wages when she wasn't "resting" (which Kelmarsh understood to mean out of an engagement), and thought herself a pretty fool for doing so. Her mother had been dead for ten years, and her only brother was in the Cape Mounted Police, and only wrote home to ask for money.

She felt bound, she said, to tell Mr. Kelmarsh, in case he had any hankering after a stage career, which wasn't

likely seeing that he was a member of Parliament who seemed to take himself seriously, that it was a dog's life, though not without its fun.

Managers, she said, were all devils, as far as she knew them. Agents were worse, and words failed her to describe their beastliness. Most actresses were cats, though some were dear things, and as for actors, she generally found that in every company there were three blackguards, twice that number of egregious idiots, and one whom she could fall in love with as soon as look at.

She gave Kelmarsh glimpses of the horrible iniquities of theatrical landladies until he was forced to ask her why she continued in a profession which made her the victim of such unpleasant experiences.

She laughed and shrugged her shoulders, pleased with the impression made by her recital of woes.

"It is a life of adventure," she said, "and I hate a humdrum existence. I should suffocate if I had to be a typist, or a shop-girl, or something dull and deadly, and respectable. I'm Irish, you know—that explains a lot, doesn't it?"

"I suppose it does," said Kelmarsh thoughtfully. "But you are the first Irish person I have met."

"Goodness gracious!" cried Miss Sullivan, making big eyes at him. "Then you *have* got a lot to learn! Where were you brought up?"

"At Burslem," said Kelmarsh, with a nervous laugh. He had the provincial's pride of his native town, as well as the provincial's self-consciousness of its somewhat limited sphere.

"No wonder, then," said Miss Sullivan. "I once played a week there in 'The Catch of the Season.' The gallery boys pelted the orchestra with orange peel and acid tablets."

"We don't all do that!" said Kelmarsh, rather nettled.

"Well, that's as far as I know Burslem," said Miss Susy Sullivan, "and it's quite enough. Thank you very much."

This conversation had taken place in jerky fashion in between Miss Susy's shopping. It puzzled Kelmarsh why

she should choose shops in different parts of London when she could probably get everything she wanted at any one of the big establishments into which she entered with an air of buying up the business. This idea seemed to her wonderfully simple and amusing, and she assured him again that he had a lot to learn. Her purchases were chiefly of ribbons and odds and ends of cheap finery, which she handed to Kelmarsh in small paper parcels. She requested him to stay outside one shop as she had to buy "nighties" and "shims" and things, not that she minded personally, she said, but she saw that he was a shy boy, and she was the last person in the world to abash youthful modesty.

Kelmarsh blushed painfully, much to her secret entertainment and to his own annoyance. As a sisterless man, unused to women, this freedom of speech was startling.

They took tea, as she had promised, at Harrod's, and she tapped out the tunes of the little orchestra with her teaspoon, while she made a hearty meal of toasted muffins.

Then with her elbows on the table and her face in her hands, entirely oblivious of the other people in the room, she examined Kelmarsh with a frank gaze.

"Do you know," she said, "you are quite a pretty boy, and amuse me a good deal! Fancy you being such a stuffy thing as a member of Parliament! I can hardly believe it."

"I haven't got used to it myself yet," said Kelmarsh. "You must remember I haven't taken my seat in the House yet."

"My acquaintance of M.P.'s," said the girl, "is seeing them over the footlights in the stalls. They all get in on paper, and they behave as if everybody were looking at them, or ought to be if they aren't. I know their glassy stare. It's peculiarly offensive! That's why you surprise me. You're human anyway, though you do take yourself ever so seriously."

Kelmarsh turned the tables on her. "Are you never serious?" he asked. "It seems to me you look upon life as nothing but a game."

"So it is," said the girl. "A giddy game."

"Don't you ever think," said Kelmarsh, "of the responsibilities of life? Don't you sometimes wonder at all the suffering and tragedy going on round you, and wish to change it all?"

"Go on," said the girl, opening her blue eyes very wide. "I like to hear you. It's as good as being in church, a thing I haven't done ever so long."

"You are laughing at me now," said Kelmarsh. "I believe you would laugh if you saw people starving to death. I believe you would think it awfully funny. Personally, I cannot forget that at this very moment people are starving to death, though they are hidden away in slums behind these gorgeous shops and streets. Do any of these well-dressed women here think that their clothes and finery are the product of sweated labour, and that they enjoy luxuries at the expense of the bodies and souls of civilized slaves?"

He got a little heated and raised his voice, to the surprise of three women at the next table, who stopped their tattle to stare at him as if he were an escaped lunatic.

"Don't stop," said Miss Sullivan. "It's lovely."

"You Londoners are the most extraordinary people," he went on. "You seem to be lacking in a sense of moral responsibility. To me you all seem as if you were smirking and dancing and tittle-tattling in the midst of Hell."

"Don't mind me," said Miss Sullivan. "I'm used to strong words."

"Plain words are best for plain facts," said Kelmarsh. "I haven't been long in London, but I have seen enough to know that its great houses and splendid streets are surrounded by squalor in which men and women lead the lives of human beasts, and I have studied economics sufficiently to know that all this luxury and magnificence—all this sort of thing"—he waved his hand at the marble pillars of the room in which they were taking tea—"is simply the result of keeping one-half of the population in misery and wretchedness, and pandering to the vicious instincts of the well-to-do. It's all wrong, damnably wrong. The rich batten on the blood of the poor."

"No wonder you're an M.P.," said Miss Susy Sullivan,

thoughtfully. "I have never heard such stuff and nonsense in all my life before. I *am* enjoying myself!"

Kelmarsh suddenly became painfully aware that he was entertaining the young lady at his own expense, and that he was merely making a fool of himself in revealing his serious convictions to one who found them "funny."

There was a pause in the conversation which Miss Susy used for the purpose of studying a neighbouring hat with a prolonged and critical stare.

"Don't you like to see all these lovely ladies? Some of them are quite expensive, I assure you. Their hubbies must work awfully hard to pay for them."

"Poor devils!" said Kelmarsh.

"Not at all," said Miss Susy. "They wouldn't do it if they didn't like it. The better dressed their wives are the more kudos they get themselves. Don't you run away with the notion that women dress for their own pleasure. They do it out of a sense of duty, and entirely to please the men. One admiring glance from your nice grey eyes would reward that long-nosed creature, in the green hat, for all the trouble she has taken."

"I can quite understand the point of view of the suffragists," said Kelmarsh. "They are women who have revolted at last from the ignominy of being men-hunters and men's playthings."

"Lord bless me!" said Miss Sullivan, impatiently. "What an innocent you are to be sure! Those suffrage creatures are playing just the same old game, only in a different and more unpleasant way. It's just because they have been left on the shelf, because they are so ugly and acid, that they make such a squeal and row. Each of them would give her head for a man. If they got a vote they would establish free love to-morrow so that they might get a chance."

"What a low opinion you have of your own sex!" said Kelmarsh, shocked by these words in the mouth of a girl who could not be more than twenty-four.

"Oh," said Miss Susy Sullivan, contemptuously, "I know 'em. I've met a few dear creatures in my time. You should hear their conversation in the dressing-rooms."

My word ! it would make your curly brown hair fall off in handfuls."

She paid her bill with a half-sovereign which she vowed was her last in the world till next pay-day. Kelmarsh felt extremely uncomfortable at being "treated" by a girl in that way, and endeavoured to persuade her to let him at least pay for himself. This she absolutely declined, threatening to be extremely angry if he did not behave himself nicely. They went home together on the top of the omnibus, and Miss Sullivan, tired of talking and being talked to, hummed lively little ditties to herself all the way, and ignored the man at her side as if unaware of his existence. He fell into her mood, for his brain was busy with many new thoughts, and the beauty of a golden afternoon in London filled him with silent ecstasy.

In the hall of the lodging house in Guildford Street Miss Sullivan took possession of her paper parcels and smiled at him with her blue eyes.

"You have been very well-behaved," she said, "and I have enjoyed myself immensely. I shall never forget your conversation at tea-time. It was like eating muffins at a funeral service."

With a merry little laugh, she darted upstairs, two at a time ; and Kelmarsh, standing for a moment before he put his hat down on the hall-table, felt a strange complication of emotions. He was annoyed at the girl's ridicule, he realized her intellectual limitations, and the touch of vulgarity in her manners ; but her piquant prettiness appealed to his senses, and her saucy *camaraderie* to his good-nature.

VII

RICHARD KELMARSH was among the forty Labour members who took their seats in the new Liberal Government at the opening of Parliament. When he walked for the first time into the Palace of Westminster,

and played a silent part in the confusion and ceremony that preceded the King's speech, it seemed to him almost as if he were in a strange dream from which he would wake to find himself in his lonely rooms over the baker's shop at Burslem. But his brain was not asleep. He was indeed curiously excited by this new experience, and his senses were thrilled in a subtle way by the atmosphere of the House and by the scene and actors of the political drama. As he paced slowly up the long white vista of Westminster Hall in a blue serge suit and soft felt hat, the heels of his Burslem-made boots clacking noisily on the hard pavement, he held his head high with a young man's pride and self-confidence, but there stole upon him in the dim light of the great Hall, with its high-groined roof and white pillars, a sense of awe at its solemn grandeur, stifling the conceitedness of his spirit. With an involuntary act he took off his felt hat, and as he passed the statues of Chatham, of Falkland, and of other illustrious men, the ghosts of these great English worthies haunted him, and he realized, at least momentarily, his insignificance and ignorance.

Democrat as he was, he glanced down at his blue suit and thick boots, abashed at the incongruity of his dress in this place of mediæval majesty, and glancing about him at the men who hurried to the inner lobbies laughing and talking noisily, his historical imagination and his artistic sense were shocked by the lack of dignity in modern dress and manners. He rebuked himself for the thought, for he believed ardently in modernity, and had strong theoretical prejudices against the survival of mediævalism in modern life. As the day passed he found within himself a constant conflict between emotion and intellect, and it left him rather confused and agitated. Intellectually, he was exasperated by the pomp and pageantry of the Royal opening; emotionally, he was fascinated by its old-world ceremonial, and disappointed even by the vulgarity which marred its solemn effects. He took part in the rush and scurry when the Gentlemen of the Commons were summoned to the bar of the Upper House, and was startled by the levity of these well-dressed men, among whom the Labour members were easily distinguished by their

short coats and democratic appearance, who seemed to treat the whole business as a game, and to be entirely unimpressed by the proceedings. Then when the King and Queen came in their robes, preceded and followed by officers of State, while a hush fell upon the great assembly, his eyes were spellbound by the colours of the scene, by the splendour of the noble chamber, by the solemn, dim atmosphere, with a grey light filtering through the stained windows, by the dramatic grouping of the chief actors. When the King rose and read out his speech, his words, spoken with decisive intonation, echoing in the deep silence, Kelmarsch breathed heavily, and his face was flushed with excitement. There came to him in a strange way visions of the French Revolution, of Louis XVI, addressing the States General, of Mirabeau, rising with his great pock-marked face to defend the liberties of the Third Order, of the legislative assembly condemning the King to death.

"What rubbish all this is!" he thought with a sudden wave of indignation. "The people are the sovereign power of the State. Why should all these men in the twentieth century tolerate this mummary?"

He listened to the opening of the Debate with an increasing feeling of impatience and disillusionment; the hollow compliments by the Leaders of the Government and the Opposition to the movers and seconders of the address irritated him, and the flippant trivial gibes of well-dressed Conservative gentlemen and well-dressed Liberal gentlemen in white and fancy waistcoats, who attacked each other with mild cynicism and irony, seemed to him a pitiful exhibition of moral weakness. Only now and again did a member strike a note of serious criticism. Indeed, the whole debate seemed to be conducted with languid interest on either side, and there was a continual straggling in and out of members who chatted to each other on the benches as though they had no interest whatever in the speeches. His blood was warmed a little by the Irishmen, who attacked the Government with fierce and bitter eloquence. They, at least, were honest, and spoke out their convictions with courage and sincerity. Then when the leader

of his own party got up, Daniel Dunstan, Labour member for Bermondsey East, amidst the cheers of the little crowd among whom Kelmarsh sat, he felt for the first time that he heard the voice of democracy in the Mother of Parliaments.

Dunstan was a short, sturdy man, with huge shoulders and a bull neck. He had a heavy, powerful face with a black beard, and large dark eyes, which at times glowed with fierce heat, but were sometimes full of a dreamy tenderness, or illuminated by a spirit of broad humour. He spoke with the strongest Cockney accent, that seemed almost deliberate in its vulgarity, for sometimes when he aspired an "h" in the right place, he corrected himself and left out the aspirate.

He rose to move an amendment to the address, calling the attention of his Majesty's Government to the urgency of the Housing Problem as it affected the lives of the poor in the slum areas of London, and to the utter inadequacy of existing provisions to remedy this gravest evil in our social conditions. His speech was short and decisive, but delivered with a rugged force and eloquence which went straight to the heart of Richard Kelmarsh, who listened with a throbbing pulse, and it caused an evident impression on the now thinly filled benches. He spoke from personal knowledge of the evils of overcrowding, and though he caused laughter by describing how, as a boy, he had lived in one room with eight people and a weekly lodger, he was heard in deep and attentive silence when he gave a dark picture of the herding of human beasts in the back streets of London behind the very highways where luxury was most garishly displayed. He gave two or three anecdotes of the degradation of humanity in such conditions. The barbarism, he said, of the lowest tribes in the heart of Africa is refined and gentle compared to the vice and beastliness of those savages of civilization in the heart of the greatest city of the world.

"The day of reckoning will come, my friends," he said. "There is a limit even to the patience of slaves and savages. On one day when the Honourable gentlemen 'ere are prattlin' with self-complacency, there will be 'eard in the

distance the sound of marching men and women, the 'oarse shouts and obscenities of human beasts who have padded from their lairs and hiding-places to demand the right and room to live. On that day those men and women, whose long dumbness and inarticulate rage will at last find expression, will use stronger arguments than I can command in this respectable assembly of well-to-do gentlemen."

One or two sharp cries of "Order" and a few jeers punctuated his sentence; but when he sat down the Labour members cheered him, and Kelmarsh heard his own voice among the loud "Hear! hear!" The amendment was seconded by John Potter in a few words, which emphasized one or two points in Dunstan's speech. A little later, Kelmarsh, seeing Dunstan rise, followed him into the lobbies. He had met him once before in Burslem, and had had letters and telegrams from him during the election. He now went up, and, in a glow of enthusiasm, offered his congratulations.

Dunstan seized his hand with a hearty grip. "My dear boy," he said, "don't you go and enthuse over mere jaw. We jaw, and jaw, and nothing is ever done by chin-wagging. I'm fairly tired of it all, but I s'pose, as the leader of Labour, I've got to do it to please the gallery boys outside. The committee rooms are the real workshops of the House—'Ouse, I mean. There you can 'ammer out the provisions of a Bill in a sensible slogging sort of way. These full-dress debates as they call 'em are all my eye and my elbow. Still I suppose you're keen to do a little spouting, eh?"

He looked down with a friendly grin at the younger man, and Kelmarsh coloured. The truth was that he had been feverishly eager to get up and make his voice heard in Parliament. What was he there for, if he did not speak?

He confessed as much to Dunstan, who guffawed at him.

"Gord bless me," he said, "you're just like the rest of us as think we must go gabbing till the grave swallows us. I remember when I first come 'ere, I thought there was a bloomin' conspiracy to keep me silent. I didn't get a chance of saying a word for half a session, and then it was 'Mr. Speaker, the honourable gent is hout of horder!' A bally good job too, now I look back on things."

He tucked Kelmarsh's arm under his own and led him off to the smoking-room.

"You'll do some good work," he said with bluff kindness, "but take my advice and keep yer tongue in yer face till you 'ave something worth saying. I b'lieve you've read a lot. That's very good in its way, but it don't go fur. What you want, my lad, is facts of life as it goes on round you. You've got to see things, and get a grip on this human whirligig. Ever been into a London slum? No. Ever spent a night in a casual ward all along of the merry fleas and the dear little lice? No. Ever seen the 'unger line on the Thames Embankment, where men with wolves inside them fight for soup tickets which keeps 'em alive in 'Ell? No. Well, what's the good of your talkin'? I asks you what's the bloomin' good of it? You're all right as a votin' machine, yer know, especially if yer does what I tell yer, but for Gord's sake don't go and make a ass of yerself by getting up on your 'ind legs and braying."

Kelmarsh was deeply disconcerted by these words, and inclined to be offended by the burly, vulgar man with the dark eyes in which there was a smouldering fire, who spoke with contemptuous good nature and pooh-poohed his knowledge. He thought of the hero-worship which had surrounded him in the working-men's debating club at Burslem, of the burning words which had excited his audiences, of the long speeches he had made before great crowds during his election campaign, and of the fight which ended in victory. Was that nothing? Was he to be put down as a foolish boy by this uncultured man? He thought, too, of his years of study, of his devotion to the political history, not only of England, but of France. Was all that reading valueless? Did it not give him a right to speak?

Dunstan, whose shrewd eyes detected something of his thoughts, put a big hand on his knee.

"Don't you go and be discouraged with yourself," he said. "And don't think I don't recognize the difference between us. You've got the book-learning which I never 'ad myself, seein' as I earned my own living at seven years of age. Come and take breakfast with me at my little 'ome in Union Street, East. The missus'll put an extra plate of

porridge on, and welcome, and I'll put you on the right line for seeing things, and show you something of 'uman nature in the rough."

Kelmarsh promised to accept his invitation, and then went back to hear the debate which was still rolling on in an endless stream of words.

VIII

THAT night, when Kelmarsh left the House, he felt faint and a little giddy. He had been without food for many hours, and the excitement of the scenes in which he had played a silent part, and the sense of disappointment and depression which he tried vainly to combat, had given him a splitting headache.

He walked briskly up Shaftesbury Avenue to Bloomsbury, and the night air refreshed him, and reminded him he ought to eat something. He resigned himself, however, to a fast, hardly expecting to get anything at the lodging-house so late at night, and remembered the old proverb quoted by D'Artagnan in "The Three Musketeers"—*Qui dort dine*. He let himself in with the latch-key which Mrs. Birch had given him that morning, and was surprised to see a light in the dining-room, and to hear the clatter of a knife and fork. He went in, and found Miss Susy Sullivan at table, making her way through a cold meal. She greeted him with her mouth full.

"Come and talk to me while I eat, won't you? It would be an act of charity. I hate being alone with myself."

She had been reading, and had propped a novelette up against the water-jug, with a candle on either side of it. The light flickered upon her face and hair, and to Kelmarsh she seemed a singularly pretty and attractive figure at that

moment, when his brain was tired after studying the faces of honourable gentlemen for many hours of a long day.

"I would rather like to eat with you as well as talk to you," he said. "I am desperately hungry."

"My dear good man!" cried Miss Sullivan, with agreeable surprise. "Join me in a sausage by all means. They are Lipton's best."

She prodded a sausage with her fork, and held it out to him.

"Can you spare it?" said Kelmarsh. "I don't want to deprive you——"

"Oh, don't be polite when you're hungry!" said the girl. "It's a savage instinct. Besides, there's more than enough for two."

Kelmarsh took a seat at table opposite her, and she tossed two sausages on to his plate with a dexterous twist of her fork.

"Carve up that loaf," she said, "while I pour you out some beer. This stout gives you awfully jolly dreams."

"This dream is good enough for me," said Kelmarsh, who was really hungry, and glad of her lively company, instead of going to a lonely room with a sinking stomach.

"Best of luck!" she said, touching his glass with her own. She gaped before she took her next sip of stout. "Lord bless me, how tired I am! It's a dog's life."

"It puzzles me how a girl like you can stand it," said Kelmarsh. "Have you been acting all the evening?"

"Call it that," said Miss Sullivan. "It sounds nice. We call it smiling under the limes—meaning the limelight. I am one of the young ladies in the chorus, don't you know, and I have to show my teeth to the front row of stalls till my jaws ache. Come and see me one evening. I light up awfully well."

"I am afraid I shall be engaged in the House," said Kelmarsh.

"Will you, indeed?" said Miss Susy, with mock solemnity. "Dear me, now, I forgot I was talking to a member of Parliament. I shall have to be careful as to what I say, or you will report me to a Select Committee. Isn't that the sort of thing you do to fill up spare time?"

She stuffed her mouth with bread and butter, and passed over the cheese to Kelmarsh.

"Funny thing, boarding-house cheese," she remarked. "It always smells of mahogany polish, stale cigars, and last night's conversation. Still, it fills up, doesn't it?"

"I'm afraid after that description I shall forgo it," said Kelmarsh.

"Sensitive youth!" said Miss Sullivan, helping herself to another slice. "It's nothing to the theatrical lodging-house cheese in a provincial town. Add the fragrance of blackbeetles, and the aroma of boot-blackening, and you get something like it. But I've been glad of it in my time. You can't afford to be squeamish on twenty-one shillings a week in a fit-up company."

She dug her elbows into the table-cloth, and rested her face in her hands—one of her characteristic attitudes at table.

"I've done," she said. "I shan't sleep a wink if I pander any more to my sensual desires. Now I'll look at you. You are so refined in your manners of eating."

"I say," said Kelmarsh, "you make me feel quite embarrassed."

But the truth was that the girl's familiar behaviour made him feel more at his ease with her than he had been with any woman, and beneath all her satirical remarks there was a charming friendliness in her manner to him which warmed him wonderfully, and removed some of his sense of loneliness and isolation in the great city.

"What a serious person you are," she said flippantly. "Do you ever sing or laugh, or do mad, delightful things for the sheer joy of making a fool of yourself?"

"No," said Kelmarsh. "I never feel tempted that way."

"What a pity!" said Miss Sullivan. "It would do you ever so much good. You look as if you had a dreadful tearful passionate past like the hero in melodrama who robbed his master's till for the sake of his beloved one, and then went off to America to become a millionaire, returning to find his dear one starving in a garret, and his old master cooking kippers for her. . . . There is a face at the window,

it is a sad, grave face with haunting wistful eyes, and it is exactly like Mr. Kelmarsh, M.P., eating sausages at midnight."

Kelmarsh joined in her ripple of laughter. "I am sorry you have such peculiar ideas of me," he said. "I assure you I have no dreadful past. But I was brought up in a rather lonely way, being an only child——"

"You look like it," said Miss Susy Sullivan.

"I suppose I am rather too serious," said Mr. Richard Kelmarsh. "People don't laugh much in Burslem. Life is grey up there, and there is more work than play. After all, it seems to me that if one thinks at all, one finds more tragedy than comedy in human nature."

"Moral," said Miss Susy Sullivan, emphatically. "Don't think."

She gaped loudly with her mouth wide open and a "Heigh ho!"

"It's time we went to our little beddy-bies."

Kelmarsh carried up her candle with his own, and she preceded him upstairs with her muslin dress picked up in front.

At her bedroom door she said she would trouble him for the light if he hadn't dropped all the grease on the stair-carpets.

"Good night," said Kelmarsh.

She gave him a queer little look which made his pulse throb with a quicker beat.

"Oh, you queer boy!" she said, and then shut the door in his face.

IX

TWO days later Kelmarsh was sitting in his room writing a letter to his mother, describing his first impressions of Parliament and of life in London, when there was a tap at his door. He thought it might be

Em'ly to tell him that tea was served downstairs, but when he called out "come in," the door opened and he was surprised to see Miss Eunice Johnston.

"Can I speak to you a moment?" she said seriously.

"Certainly," said Kelmarsh, rising from his chair; "here or downstairs?"

He felt a little nervous at inviting a lady into his bed-sitting-room. In Burslem it would be against all the canons of propriety. But Miss Johnston seemed to regard it as a matter of course.

"Oh, here," she said, "if it is not inconvenient."

"Do take a chair," said Kelmarsh, awkwardly.

Miss Johnston sat down with quiet self-possession. She was dressed neatly in black, and Kelmarsh noticed that her mouse-coloured hair was parted in the middle and looped over each ear, giving her an Early Victorian look. Her pale face, with its rather large grey eyes and long-drooping mouth, seemed to him curious, and she had a certain air of refinement and grace which Kelmarsh, though a Burslem man and the son of a watchmaker, recognized as the characteristics of a "lady" in the old-fashioned sense of the word.

"I have brought the ticket for the Suffrage Meeting," she said. "Will you be able to come?"

"I think so," said Kelmarsh, after a momentary hesitation. "I could at least stay for an hour."

"I am glad," said Miss Johnston, simply.

She sat for a moment silent and thoughtful, and Kelmarsh went hot and cold with embarrassment, extraordinarily shy as usual of a woman's company. Then she raised her eyes and searched his face with an utter lack of self-consciousness.

"I want," she said, smiling faintly, "to make a convert of you. I can do so little for the cause, but I feel that if I could get you really on our side, and inspire you with the spirit of the movement, it would be a splendid thing."

Kelmarsh flushed self-consciously, and his heart leapt for a moment. But he answered modestly enough—

"Oh, I count for nothing."

"I feel that you do," said Miss Johnston. "It is not

that you are a member of Parliament. That is something, but there are so many men in the House who theoretically believe in women's suffrage and damn it with mild support, without honesty or courage. You, I believe, have both honesty and courage."

"What makes you think so," said Kelmarsh, raising his eyebrows and flushing in spite of himself.

"Well, at the table downstairs you always think before you speak, and you are not afraid to express your convictions, though that stupid old Mr. Vinnicombe glares at you, and Mr. Pond seems to find your remarks extremely funny."

"It *is* rather painful sometimes," said Kelmarsh; "but I cannot palter with what I believe is the truth."

"Ah," said Miss Johnston, with a touch of eagerness. "I admire you for that! There is not one man in a thousand nowadays who has any real sincerity."

She clasped and unclasped her hands on her lap, with a nervous gesture.

"I believe," she said, "there is a great chance for a man who would champion our cause with enthusiasm and eloquence. I feel that we have been fighting too independently. Men will only be led by men, and we want a leader of your sex—a real leader who would stand out of his ranks and call out any spirit of chivalry left in the nation. Men mock at us, and do not understand. They must be taught that the freedom of womanhood from its old trammels is the promise of a new world more beautiful and more harmonious than any civilization made by men alone."

Her eyes glowed with a fierce enthusiasm, and crossing her knees she leant forward towards him.

"I wonder!" said Kelmarsh, thoughtfully. "I should like to think you are right."

"Oh, I *am* right," she said, and her face was illumined. "You do not know how we women pant for freedom. The vision of liberty that has come to us is like the sight of the Promised Land. For centuries we have been slaves with shackled souls and bodies. Men have scourged us more cruelly than they flogged their blacks in the old plantation

days. They have scourged us with insults, and they have kept us imprisoned in the dark. They have stunted our intellect, and thwarted every impulse of our nature. We have been tightly bound up in the conventions and superstitions of a man-made world like Chinese feet crushed into dainty slippers. You have no idea of the way in which women have been, and still are, tortured in the sacred name of domesticity! Ibsen was one of the first modern men to show the beating of women's hearts at the bars of their prison cells; but in all literature the poets of the world have revealed the truth or the half truth of the mystery of womanhood, which is the desire for liberty and the revolt against the tyranny of their fate."

"Forgive me," said Kelmarsh, startled by the passionate outburst, "but do you not exaggerate? Frankly, I know little of women, but when I think of my mother, one of the most old-fashioned of women, and of her calm and placid spirit, I am rather mystified by your words."

"Slaves get used to their chains," said Miss Johnston. "It is no wonder that after centuries of domestic servitude the majority of women shudder at the thought of liberty. But they must be liberated in spite of themselves." She pushed back her hair with her nervous white hands. "If you want to see women in their torture chambers, go into the suburbs, or into the West End, or the East End of London, or into any other happy English home. There you will see the thumb-screw and the rack in full working order."

The girl spoke with extraordinary bitterness. While she had been talking she had risen, and paced up and down as though she were alone in the room. Kelmarsh was silent, deeply startled by this revelation of a woman's soul, and by this terrible indictment of social life.

"Would votes for women cure these things?" he said at last, seeking in a way characteristic of him, a practical solution of the problem.

"No," said the girl. "It would not by itself. I am not foolish enough to think that the franchise would give women immediate liberty from spiritual and physical

bondage. But the vote is a battle-cry and a symbol ; and it would at least in a thousand small ways give women the power to order their own lives, and to remedy some of the most flagrant abuses of their sisters. But much more than this, it would educate the mass of women towards the ideals of liberty, it would give them at least a theoretical equality with men. Believe me, men would not suffer. They, too, would be lifted up, for they are just as much degraded by the present relations of the sexes as women themselves. The tyrant is more degraded than the slave, and the man who wields the lash more brutalized than the quivering creature who shrieks under it."

To Kelmarsh's surprise and intense discomfort, she suddenly burst into tears. He tried to soothe her by expressions of sympathy, and yielding to a sudden impulse, he bent over her and put his hand on her shoulder, saying, "Hush ! hush !" as he would to a weeping child.

She looked up and dashed the tears from her eyes. "Forgive me," she said, getting up. "This is absurd of me. I had no notion I was so overwrought."

She walked to the door, and her usually pale face was suffused with deep colour as though she were ashamed of her weakness.

"Have I convinced you at all?" she said, smiling rather wistfully, as she stood holding the door handle and looking back at him.

"Yes," said Kelmarsh ; "I believe you have, to some extent."

He was moved by a sudden wave of emotion and enthusiasm. The girl's words had stirred him deeply.

"Oh !" she said, "I am so glad ! I am so glad !"

She opened the door and closed it behind her noiselessly, and Kelmarsh, left alone, strode up and down his room for an hour or more with his hands behind him, absorbed in the great problem of womanhood, which had been opened up by the extraordinary conversation with his fellow-lodger.

X

MR. DANIEL DUNSTAN, M.P., or as he was known more familiarly down Bermondsey way, "Our Dan," lived in the eighty-third house of a street where three hundred and fifty small houses stood on each side of the way in hideous uniformity. They were designed by a builder whose knowledge of architecture seemed to have been gained from a child's box of bricks, and whose artistic taste was a little lower than that of a Hottentot. They were built of bricks bought in cheap lots from the rubbish heaps of house-breakers, and they were put together with plaster made of London mud. After standing ten years, during which time they had been bought and sold by an unknown number of Jewish gentlemen who raised the rents periodically, great cracks had appeared in their walls, plaster had crumbled away and left gaps between the mouldering bricks, the window-frames had warped, and the doors hung askew on their hinges. Here and there down the street a tenant with extraordinary self-respect had bought his own pot of paint and had "decorated" his door with a new coat of a bright and striking colour, but the paint on most of the houses had worn off in patches, and the Jew landlords watched the process of decay with complacency, knowing that as the population increased in the district, and the struggle for room to live became more desperate, they could squeeze up the rents still higher so long as the houses did not actually fall to bits. As a rule, several families lived in one house, and most of them took in lodgers. In many cases families of six or eight had only one room in which to sleep and eat, or in which to sleep and starve, according to the measure of their prosperity.

In the daytime, after school hours, the doorsteps swarmed with children, who had the faces of old men and women, and the stunted bodies of a pygmy race. They played games in the roadway according to the wonderful law of Nature which makes even the children of misery play, and bald-headed babies, sitting on the kerbstone, watched the

shrill merriment of their elders with grave and wondering eyes, or scratched in the gutters for cabbage stalks and potato peelings. At night, one might hear queer noises in Union Street. From the cracked windows came the ceaseless wailing of sickly infants whose cries mingled with the witch-like howlings of lean cats on the housetops. Sometimes a woman's shrieks would ring out, and one would hear the dull thud of heavy blows. Once or twice during recent months the policeman on duty had seen a woman clad in nothing but a ragged nightgown rush out of a doorway, and come towards him with ear-splitting cries of "Murder!" The policeman with an experience of human nature down East knew that in most cases it was a false alarm, caused by a drunken husband, over-excited, and brandishing a poker or a stool and threatening to smash his wife and children to bits, but otherwise quite harmless. Yet there had been two or three quite important murders in Union Street within the past year or so. In one case a man had thrown four children out of window one after another, and walked quietly out of the house to give himself up, explaining that the kid's continual cries for food which he could not get for them had got upon his nerves. He wasn't sorry for what he had done. It was best for the kids and best for himself. In another case, a woman had been found with her throat cut. The lodgers had heard a struggle upstairs, and terrible shrieks, but they hadn't bothered about the matter. In Union Street one doesn't pay much attention to such noises.

To Kelmarsh the journey to Dunstan's house was a revelation of a world in London which he had not entered before. He took an omnibus part of the way and walked the other part. He found himself walking through acres of mean streets, so squalid, and so desperately grim and ugly that his soul was sickened. He was appalled by the vastness of the slum-quarter and by the thought of the enormous population living in such hideous surroundings. It was eight o'clock in the morning, for he was to breakfast with Dunstan at nine. Labourers came out of the small brick houses and trudged off to their work as dirty as though their day's work were done, with a miserable

slouching walk which showed a pitiful lack of vitality and of any joy in life. White-faced men in battered bowler hats, shabby black coats, and trousers baggy at the knees and frayed at the ends, hurried along with tired, lack-lustre eyes. Kelmarsh supposed they must be clerks in warehouses, or factory hands. Frowsy women, with touzled hair, dressed in cast-off clothes that had once been decent, but were now stained and torn, carried brown paper parcels in their hands, or bundles of rags. They were probably charwomen or the cleaners of city offices. Kelmarsh also met crowds of young girls, most of them weary looking, with pale unhealthy faces, and draggle-tail dresses. But some of them, he was glad to see, had a certain gaiety, and shouted out jokes to each other as they went along. They were unmistakably factory girls. Half a dozen of them with linked arms drove him into the roadway and then called out some obscene words to him, screeching with laughter at their own evil mirth. It seemed to him that even their obscenity was better than the dull-eyed misery of the others.

At the street corners filthy men were polishing up the gilt lettering on the windows of small public-houses, yawning as they worked in a listless way. In the gutters some human scarecrows, male and female, with claw-like hands and vulture eyes, were picking over scrap heaps, and the sour-smelling rubbish of dust-bins.

In all Kelmarsh's long walk there was not a bright spot, not a thing of beauty, not a human being with any bit of self-respect. He thought of Dunstan's speech in the House during the debate on the Address. The man was right, he thought. How long will these people suffer patiently? when will they realize their own misery and demand something else than this daily toil at starvation wages? And some of the resentment that had smouldered in him at Dunstan's good-natured contempt of his abilities flickered down. Yes, he must know more of the inner lives of these people, and of their social economy before he could speak with authority and first-hand knowledge. His democratic ideals were too vague, and taken too much from literature and from his own inner conscious-

ness. He must get at facts. He must feed himself with facts. Then he would declare war against the damnable aristocracy and middle-class of a nation in which there were such hideous contrasts of wealth and poverty.

"Surely, even revolution would be justified! What was the use of constitutional liberty when social conditions led to a brutal cruelty, by which human lives were trampled upon and human souls crushed and stifled."

He said the words aloud to himself, striking a fist against the palm of his left hand. For a moment he imagined himself addressing the crowded benches of the House. Then he coloured with a sudden self-consciousness which made him uncomfortable.

"What a fool I am!" he muttered.

XI

WHEN he knocked at No. 83 the door was opened by a girl of sixteen, with her back hair in a pigtail and her fringe in curl-papers.

"It's too early to see Pa," she said, before he had opened his lips. "He's having his breakfast, and we don't disturb him. If you want charity apply at the Board of Guardians down the street. They open at nine."

Kelmarsh smiled at this resolute young person. "I don't want charity," he said, "except that I have been invited to breakfast."

"Oh," said the girl, flashing a keen look at him with black eyes like her father's. "I forgot—you're Mr. Kelmarsh, aren't you? Sorry I spoke."

"It's all right," said Kelmarsh.

"As a matter of fact," said the girl, "Pa's dressing. He'll be down in a moment. Come into the front parlour, won't you?"

She led him into a narrow hall furnished only with

oilcloth and a bamboo hat-stand, on which Kelmarsh recognized Dunstan's black felt billy-cock. Then she took him into a little room and, pushing a deck-chair forward, pointed to the morning paper on a bamboo table near by.

"Breakfast will be ready soon," said the girl. "Ma's cooking the kippers. P'r'aps you can smell them?"

"I can," said Kelmarsh. "Don't let me bother you."

"Oh, no bother, I'm sure," said the daughter of the Labour member.

She left him alone, and for ten minutes he examined the room with curiosity. Over the mantelpiece there was a crude oil-painting of Dunstan himself, with an inscription on the frame to the effect that it was presented to Mr. Daniel Dunstan, M.P., by his former fellow-workers at Forman's Engineering Sheds upon his election to Parliament. "Three cheers for our Dan." The marble clock underneath bore a similar inscription. On each side of the mantel-shelf was a glass case with stuffed birds and dried foliage, and the shelf itself was crowded with small knick-knacks, among which was an extraordinary variety of comic animals guarded on each side by two tall vases, so astonishingly hideous in colour and design that Kelmarsh shut his eyes for a moment and gave an involuntary shudder.

Kelmarsh was studying two oil-paintings of ships in distress, and wondering whether they had been done by a pavement artist, when the door was opened noiselessly and Dunstan came in. He was in his shirt and trousers, and had not troubled to put on a coat or waistcoat. He came forward with a hearty greeting.

"Glad to see you, Kelmarsh, my dear boy, and sorry to keep yer waitin'. I see you've been examining my 'ouse'old gods. They're not worth much, but I'm proud of 'em."

He stood in front of the two oil-paintings and gazed at them with a glow of admiration in his black eyes.

"Pretty good those, eh? Sea-effects, what?"

"Yes," said Kelmarsh, seeking for safe praise. "It's sea, right enough."

"Ah," said Dunstan, "I thought you'd like 'em. They were given me by a young artist chap down on his luck, dreadfully down on his uppers; I did 'im a good turn, and 'e was grateful, for a wonder."

He gazed round the room evidently eager to show off its treasures.

"Not that I can complain of ingratitude," he said. "Of course there's some men as would steal your teaspoons after you'd saved 'em from starvation. But there's a deal of good feelin' in the world too. Why, bless my soul, almost everythink in this room was given to me by pals and people I've done a little bit for. You'd be surprised. They send me comic pigs, and comic cats, and I don't know what else, just to show their affection. These vawses—fine, aren't they?—were given me by a widder with five children that I saved from starving. Hadn't a bite in their rooms, and scarcely a rag to their backs. The 'usband had drunk up every stick of furniture. I got her a bit of charing, and so on, and the first thing she did out of her little savings was to buy them vawses. I wouldn't part with them for fifty pounds apiece. It meant more than that to Mrs. Budge."

Dunstan's description of his household gods was interrupted by repeated cries of "Dan-yell! Dan-yell!" in a shrill and horrible voice, which made Kelmarsh start in something like consternation.

"Comin', old girl!" called out Dunstan, cheerily. He laughed as he linked his arm in Kelmarsh's. "That's my parrot, Polly Perkins. She's as artful as a cartload of monkeys! Always knows when breakfast's ready."

Kelmarsh breathed a sigh of relief. For a moment he thought the witch-like voice belonged to Mrs. Dunstan.

The adjoining room into which Kelmarsh was taken was so small that he could hardly squeeze between the wall and the breakfast-table. On the opposite side was the stout, placid woman, whose face he had already seen in several photographs. She was in a blue dressing-gown, which revealed her ample figure, and she smiled at him over the brown teapot with a quiet and amiable greeting.

"This is Mr. Kelmarsh, mother," said Dunstan. "One of our young men who's going to do big things."

"I'm sure you must be hungry after your long journey," said Mrs. Dunstan. "I hope you don't despise a plate of porridge and a kipper?"

"Why should I?" said Kelmarsh. "It's just the thing after a morning walk."

"Beatrice, my love," said Mrs. Dunstan, "'and up that warm plate, and don't tread on Peterkin. Peterkin's the cat," she said to Kelmarsh. "He *will* stick himself down in front of the fire."

"Ah," said Dunstan, "if I believed in the reincarnation theory, which 'as something to say for itself, I should believe Peter was a peer in 'is past life. He's a lazy devil, and likes all luxury and no work."

"Dan, dear," said Mrs. Dunstan, "do be careful of your language."

"All right, mother," said Dunstan, with a hunk of bread and butter in his mouth. "Mr. Kelmarsh don't mind."

Kelmarsh was taking a sip of tea when he was startled by a cackle of hoarse laughter, and a voice at his elbow say, "Well, I'm damned! Well, I'm damned!"

It was Polly Perkins, who had put her head on one side, and was gazing at Kelmarsh with a curious and evil eye.

Dunstan turned round with a guffaw and scratched the parrot's neck affectionately.

"You wicked old woman," he said. "You ought to be spificated, that's what you ought to be."

"Blast you!" said the parrot, angrily. "Blast you!"

Mrs. Dunstan was covered with confusion. "Dan bought her off a sailor at Wapping," she hastened to explain. "She says some dreadful things, but you mustn't mind."

Polly Perkins whistled the first bars of "Sally in our Alley," and then rising on her perch shrieked out, "You devil! You dirty devil!" to the intense amusement of the member for Bermondsey.

"I'd like to take 'er to the 'Ouse when the Irish are

kicking up a shindy," he said. "She'd add wonderfully to the general effect."

Mrs. Dunstan told Beatrice to give the wretch some sugar.

"Anything to keep her quiet."

Miss Beatrice had nearly got back to her seat before there was a dull thudding knock on the first door.

"See who it is, Babs," said Dunstan.

"Oh lor'," said the young lady, "there's no peace and quiet in this house."

"No," said her father, throwing the skin and bones of his kipper into the fire. "Nor in this life, either, and don't you forget it."

His daughter came back after a few moments' conversation at the front door.

"The usual thing," she said. "Another man out of work, wants a pair of boots to walk to Mitcham where he can get a job, and a bit of food for his wife and children."

"How many children?" said Dunstan.

"Five," said the girl. "Got any more tea, Ma? Mine is quite cold."

"It makes the 'eart bleed, don't it?" said Mrs. Dunstan. "But one almost gets used to it, in this district. Trade is very bad just now."

"It always is," said Dunstan. "I've never known the time when every good man could get a job, besides which thousands who couldn't work if they had the chance. And it's not their fault, mind you! That's the mistake made by these fools in Parliament. They don't understand that a man born and reared in vice, with a weak body and a degenerate brain, is utterly incapable of work. They're the slaves of Fate. We can't alter the men, while the conditions prevail as made them what they are. What *we've* got to do is to alter Fate, or, in other words, change the conditions."

"Don't jaw so much, Pa," said the girl with the pigtail. "What am I to tell the man?"

"Tell him to come round to the Guardians' Office in 'arf an hour, and I'll see what I can do," said Dunstan.

Beatrice came back and ate another slice of bread and

butter, while Kelmarsh questioned Dunstan as to the average rate of wages for unskilled labour, and the problem of pauper relief, upon which subject the leader of the Labour Party had a mass of facts, and some strong and revolutionary opinions. Then there came another knock at the door.

"See who it is this time, my love," said Dunstan.

"What a life!" said the girl, tightening her lips with an expression of deep annoyance.

"That's how they go on all the time," said Mrs. Dunstan. "Knock, knock, knock, and they won't give my 'usband a moment's rest."

"I'm paid for it," said Dunstan, pouring his tea into his saucer, and swallowing it in great gulps.

"It's a cripple," said Miss Beatrice, coming back. "His wife has broken up his crutches for firewood, and he wants an artificial leg."

"Well," said Dunstan, "I don't keep artificial legs in the china cupboard, do I? Tell him to go to the workhouse infirmary."

"He's been there," said the girl, "and they won't do anything for him."

"Oh, won't they," said Dunstan, flushing angrily, "I'll see about that!" He struck his fist on the table. "My Gawd," he said, "those workhouse officials want waking up! I'll give 'em a bit of what for this morning."

"But how did the man get here, if he hasn't got any crutches?" said Kelmarsh.

"Yes," said Dunstan, "there's something in that."

"He said he borrowed 'em off another cripple in the same house, who is kept to his bed because his trousers are in pawn, and he can't afford to get them out."

"Why that must be Bob Winchley," said Dunstan, "and I gave him an old pair of mine only last week! There's no helping some men."

"I told you so at the time," said Mrs. Dunstan, "that Winchley is bad right through."

"Well, who made him bad, mother?" said Dunstan. "Has society ever tried to make him good? He smashed both his legs in an accident at the saw-mills. That was

before the Compensation Act, and he didn't get a week's extra wages. Is that the sort of thing to make a man good?"

"Well, what about this man on the doorstep, Pa?" said the girl. "He'll think you're making him a leg."

"Tell him to leave his name and address," said Dunstan. "If I don't give a little bit of hell to those infirmity officials my name is not Dan Dunstan."

"Well, don't be too rash," said Mrs. Dunstan. "You know you *are* rash, Dan."

"Rash?" said Dunstan. "When I've got my temper up I'm a roaring lion. Rash ain't the word for me then."

He chuckled as if pleased to confess to such violence.

Kelmarsh was deeply impressed by the rugged strength and the humanity of the man. Underneath all his violence of opinions, which in a crude uncultivated way expressed Kelmarsh's own convictions about the social conditions of the time, and the deadly warfare between class and class, there was an almost womanly tenderness and compassion with the sufferings of the poor. Once there were tears in his eyes, when he spoke of the dull misery of the people in his district, and told anecdotes of their desperate and unavailing fight against sheer starvation poverty.

"A man," he says, "gets knocked out of tune by illness and loses his job. His wife does a bit of charring, and keeps him alive. When he picks up he goes back to the works and asks to be taken on again. His place has been filled up. He tramps from one part of the town to another, and comes back dog-tired. 'I'm not wanted,' he says. 'Not wanted, my God! and I'm a strong man still!' Presently he gives up looking for work. 'What's the bloomin' use?' he says. Gradually his strength of body and brain is sapped. He doesn't get enough to eat. The kids come first. Then he gets listless, moody and weak. So gradually he sinks down and down, until all self-respect is gone, and he's a 'bad case.' I have seen thousands of 'em in my time."

"What puzzles me," said Kelmarsh, "is why they don't save up for a rainy day. Some of them earn good wages when they're in luck."

"Ah," said Dunstan, "that's a lesson they won't learn. It isn't in their nature. The poor are all fatalists. Earn and spend, is their motto. Their life is so grey, that when they've got a bit they go on the bust, as they call it. They must get a little excitement somehow, just to feel they're alive. Why do they drink? I'll tell you—they drink to live. It stimulates their low vitality, and lifts them up even for a little while out of the dull and dreary rut."

"I don't wonder," said Mrs. Dunstan. "Look at the 'omes they've got! A man can't bear to spend his evenings in a room like a pigsty, with fretful children, and a woman whose nerves are like fiddle-strings. But it isn't the men who drink most. It's the women now. I've known women sell the baby's cradle and the last rags off their children's backs, to get a drop of drink."

"And I don't blame them," said Dunstan. "People who live in Hell naturally behave like devils. I've no patience with the Temperance fools, inside and outside the 'Ouse. They concoct new laws to keep people sober, and they leave the root of the evil untouched. Restrictions on the sale of drink are all my eye and my elbow. If people want drink they'll get it somehow. What you've got to do is to reform their social surroundings. Bring colour and brightness into these mean streets. Teach them the meaning of joy, which needs no artificial aid. How are you going to do it? It's not easy."

"You can't do it without a social revolution," said Kelmarsh, earnestly. "There must be an entire redistribution of wealth. We must get rid of hereditary rights over vast acres of land. We must get rid of the cursed feudal system, which is still the basis of English law, and we must so safeguard labour that it is not at the mercy of capital."

"I believe you, my boy," said Dunstan, with an ironical laugh. "Those things have been said before, you know. But how are you going to *do* it?"

"By educating the people," said Kelmarsh. "They must be taught ideals of liberty, and their own interests."

"Ah, the blessed word education! . . . My lad," said Dunstan, "you can't put ideals of liberty into brains

deadened by long servitude. What the people want is not liberty, but good wages and regular work. Besides, the majority of them are more conservative than the Tory of the bluest blood. If there's one thing the average working man dislikes, it's change. And though he may be a professional thief in private life, he is so little of a robber in political creed that if you took an acre of land away from the Premier Duke it would outrage Bill Sikes's moral sense. That's why a Liberal Government goes to pieces so quickly."

"One day," said Kelmarsh, "the people will find a leader. Some man like Danton, who will give them a new ideal, and inspire them with a passion for liberty."

"When that day comes," said Dunstan, "there will be blood in Bermondsey."

"And you will defend the first barricade," said Kelmarsh.

Dunstan laughed loudly, and then was very silent for a few moments.

"It will be three generations before the people rise," he said presently. "Then if the struggle for life increases at its present rate, the revolution is bound to come. . . . But we shan't see it, which perhaps is well."

XII

AFTER breakfast Dunstan put on his coat and waistcoat, and his black felt hat, and suggested that Kelmarsh should go with him for half an hour to the Guardians' Offices opposite.

"It will be an object-lesson in misery to you," he said.

When Kelmarsh thanked Mrs. Dunstan for her kind hospitality, she held his hand in hers for a moment, and he saw that her placid and rather bovine eyes were filled with emotion.

"Oh, Mr. Kelmarsh," she said. "You're a young man beginning the battle against the things of evil. My dear husband had spent himself in the fight, but he's done a power of good to thousands of poor people. You could not do better than follow in his footsteps. I say this though I'm his wife and p'r'aps shouldn't."

"Why, mother," said Dunstan, giving her plump hand a squeeze, "you'd make a 'oly saint of me, aureole and all."

"Well," said Mrs. Dunstan, seriously, "one of these days p'r'aps you'll be in a stained-glass window if the poor of Bermondsey take to religion."

Dunstan laughed at this till the tears came into his eyes.

"It's the best thing you've ever said, mother," he declared. "It'll keep me merry for a week."

Kelmarsh then walked to the Board of Guardians with Dunstan. It was only a short way, but the Labour member stopped a dozen times or more to talk to some one, and every man he met touched his hat to him.

He seemed to have a strong affection for children and young boys, and cracked jokes with those he passed.

"Why, Tommy," he said to one small, pale-faced boy, who was sitting in a doorway with his knees tucked up and his face on his hands, staring wistfully in front of him. "Why ain't you at school, you young varmint?"

"Sister's been took to the 'orspital with scarlet fever," said the boy, "and the bloomin' doctor sez I'm to be hiserlated."

"Oh, he does, does he?" said Dunstan. "And that's what you call isolation? Well, here's a penny to buy some brandy balls with."

Several men came up to ask him whether he knew of any job going, and a woman with a deadly white face and dark, mournful eyes came and cried to him, saying that her husband had gone on the blind again and she wished he were dead, but no such luck.

"Mention my name to him," said Dunstan, "and say if he don't be'ave himself I will put the Prevention of Cruelty on to him. If that won't sober 'im, I don't know what will."

Further on he pointed out an elderly man slouching along on the other side of the way in filthy rags tied together with string.

"That's an old school-fellow of mine," he said, "and we were both born in the same workhouse. He's gone down and I've gone up. What's the reason for the difference? That's the kind of thing that makes me wonder. I suppose inherited character has a lot to do with it, and then luck, or chance, or destiny, or whatever you like to call the mysterious power that makes one man go one way and one another."

"I often doubt whether there is any such thing as Free-will," said Kelmarsh. "It seems to me that no man is really responsible for his actions. The man who bashes in his wife's brains can no more help doing that brutality than a man, whose instincts compel him towards expressing his ideas in colour, can help painting pictures. The murderer has impulses inherited from vicious parents, and fostered by an evil environment, both things over which he has no control, and from which he has no power to free himself. The other man inherits artistic impulses and emotions, fostered by surroundings of refinement and beauty. Neither man has the choice of his fate. He is impelled by powers outside himself."

"I grant you that," said Dunstan. "We are all the slaves of circumstance. But, at least, if we are not masters of our own destiny, we can influence the destiny of others. That is the great lesson. In your case, for instance, the artist bloke with good impulses should help to destroy the incubating ground of the brain-basher's impulses. Altruism is the great law of life. In other words, 'Little children, love one another.'"

He took Kelmarsh into the outdoor relief room at the Guardians' Office. It was a long, bare room, furnished only with rows of benches. On these sat some eighty or ninety men and women, and Kelmarsh was shocked to see that they were mostly young or middle-aged people. They sat in absolute silence, haggard, weary, and utterly despondent. Most of the men were in corduroys. "Unskilled labourers," said Kelmarsh, "with empty bellies.

Not one of 'em could put up a square fight." The women were nearly all in black, grease-stained and mud-stained, with dirty hands and faces. Their gaunt cheek-bones, thin mouths, and tired eyes, gave a sickening sensation to Kelmarsh. Curiously enough, Miss Susy Sullivan's face, with its plump prettiness and impudent eyes, appeared vividly to his imagination at this moment as a delightful contrast to these types of wretched womanhood.

Dunstan spoke to some of them, and they answered him with a kind of wistful eagerness, as though he could be the fairy godmother of their fate. Then he led Kelmarsh into the office where four men sat before a great ledger spread open on a mahogany table. They rose as Dunstan went in, and greeted him warmly, with just a trace of deference.

"D'ye mind if me and my friend sit here a bit and listen to the roll-call?" said Dunstan.

The four men didn't mind in the least. They were only too glad to welcome a man who had been a Guardian for fifteen years before his election to a higher place.

To Kelmarsh the next hour was an experience which he did not soon forget.

One by one the applicants for outdoor relief were called in and cross-examined, the ledger being consulted for previous entries to their names. The stories of the men had a deadly similarity. They had been thrown out of employment by ill-health; they had tramped all day long for work, week in, week out; they had wives and children; they had sold up next to every stick; they hadn't a crust of bread or a nubble of coal for a little creature comfort.

The Guardians questioned them with stern brevity, whispering together for a moment or two after consulting the ledger.

"You are given to drink, aren't you?"

"I've taken a drop too much now and agin. We all hev our weaknesses, governor."

"You've been on the books five weeks, and haven't got any work yet."

"Where the 'Ell is there work?"

"You had better go to the Union. Wait outside for a ticket."

"Oh Gawd, give us another chanst, gents! I can't abide the thought of the Union, and it'll fair break the wife's heart."

"Poor devil!" said Dunstan, when the case had gone. "There's no help for it. The fellow has been half-starved too long. There's not an employer in London who would give him work. That's the matter with half of them—they're too weak to work. All their manhood has gone."

In many cases the Guardians gave grants of coal and food, and the applicants mumbled words of thanks for this temporary relief. Some of the women burst into tears, and thanked God for the sake of the little ones. Their stories and their pitiful misery tore at Kelmarsh's heart. For an hour or more it seemed to him that he had a vision of a human Hell.

Then Dunstan took him outside. "It's made you feel bad, hasn't it?" he said.

"It's frightful," said Kelmarsh—"frightful!" Then he burst out into passionate indignation at a society which would tolerate such misery in its midst. "Over there," he said, waving his arms to the West, "are people wallowing in wealth; so burdened with wealth that it is a curse to them, and they do not care a brass farthing at the sacrifice of these lives and souls. It's damnable! It makes my blood boil so that I could murder some of them."

"Give them their due," said Dunstan. "Some of them care very much, and give thousands in charity, not understanding."

"Charity!" cried Kelmarsh. "Charity! Pah!"

"Quite so," said Dunstan. "It's about as much good as putting lavender water on a cancerous growth. What's the good of all the outdoor relief? It helps a few individuals to tide over the worst time; but in a vast number of cases it only postpones the final surrender to complete pauperism. We must go on with it while the present social condition lasts; but it's no cure for a national disease."

"It is the way in which the rich stifle their consciences," said Kelmarsh, bitterly. "The middle-class pay their rates, and thank God they do their duty to the poor. Hypocrites! Hypocrites!"

"Well, well," said Dunstan, quietly, "we must do our little best." He stared down the street in deep thought. "We are pygmies fighting against the giants of evil," he said. Then he took Kelmarsh by the arm. "Come," he said, "let's go to the House to listen to some more humbug."

XIII

MRS. BIRCH explained to her new lodger that they generally had a "Musical evening" on Sunday, and she hoped very much, if he had no conscientious objections, which was the case with one of her late boarders who always took to drink on that day, that he would join the little gathering, especially as Mr. Phil Darlington, the actor, was now home from the "Jolly Jack" tour, and was a wonderfully comic gentleman; "and between ourselves," said the landlady in a mysterious whisper, "very much *tout ensemble*, as they say, with dear Miss Susy."

Kelmarsh gathered that the gist of these various statements was an invitation, and having nothing special to do that evening, he accepted it. Curiously enough, however, he conceived a prejudice against Mr. Phil Darlington, whom he had not yet seen. For some reason he did not like his name being coupled with that of Miss Sullivan, who, in spite of her occasional vulgarity, charmed him, almost in spite of himself, with her high spirits, and continual good humour.

After supper, he put on a black coat and came downstairs to the dining-room, where Miss Susy, in a pink *voile* dress with baby tucks and frills, was already at

the piano playing Mendelssohn's "Wedding March" in the grandiose style. Mrs. Birch herself sat in black satin, with her hands folded on her lap, looking exactly as if she were in Church listening to the sermon of a favourite curate. Mr. Vinnicombe, the oldest lodger, was playing chess with Mr. Pond, the pimply-faced young man who was something in the city, and Miss Ringwood, the literary lady, was playing Patience with two packs of cards spread all over the red cloth of the dining-room table. In a far corner of the room Mr. Henderson sat very still and quiet with a book on his lap which he was not reading. Kelmarsh wondered whether the old gentleman was thinking of the Co-Ordination of Knowledge, but noticed that he occasionally glanced over his gold-rimmed pince-nez at Miss Ringwood. The other city gentleman, whose name Kelmarsh could not remember, and who seemed to have a completely colourless character, was smoking a cigarette and reading a Sunday newspaper. Before the fire sat Miss Eunice Johnston with her foot on the fender, and with her hands clasped about her knees, as she leant forward and stared into the glowing coals, with a little frown. Kelmarsh's eyes lingered on her for a moment. Her attitude, and the effect of the firelight flickering upon her, suggested a sketch. He wished he had his pencil with him.

Then he became conscious of a stranger in the room. It was evidently Phil Darlington, the actor. He was a young man with a good-looking, clean-shaven face, though with a quaint comical twist at the corner of his lips. As he looked across at Kelmarsh there was a glint of merriment in his grey eyes, and he startled the member for Burslem by seizing the gilt poker from the fireplace, and advancing towards him, holding it erect, then retreated backwards with mock solemnity beating time to the thumping chords of the "Wedding March." Miss Susy ended it with a final crash on a wrong chord, and a little shriek of dismay, which caused Mr. Vinnicombe to knock over his partner's Queen and Knight and six Pawns, and to say things below his breath.

"Bravo, Miss Susy!" said Mr. Darlington, cheerily.

"I hope they'll play it as well when you march down the aisle. 'The bride looked beautiful in *mousseline de soie* and old point lace. She smiled through her tears, and one of them fell with a tiny splash upon her bridegroom's hands, who kissed it away ardently. It was an affecting moment, and the bride's mother-in-law burst into passionate sobs.'"

"Something went wrong with that final chord," said Miss Susy. "It must have been a misprint. That's the worst of these cheap books. Two hundred best pieces, price one shilling."

"It has spoilt our game," said Mr. Vinnicombe; "and I had got it in my hands."

"That I utterly decline to acknowledge," said Mr. Pond, the city gentleman.

"Oh, Mr. Kelmarsh," said Mrs. Birch, with a long-drawn smile on her thin lips, "I haven't introduced you. This is Mr. Darlington, one of my most popular lodgers, though I am sure we are all on very good terms, which is more than in most boarding-houses, with home comforts. Mr. Darlington, this is Mr. Kelmarsh, who I believe I am right in saying, though I know nothing about politics, is a staunch Conservative in the Labour party."

"Pleased to meet you," said Mr. Darlington; "though the description seems a little mixed."

"I am a Labour member," said Kelmarsh, a little stiffly.

"Really?" said Darlington. "A very honest calling, I've no doubt. Do you chirp at all?"

"I'm not quite sure I follow?" said Kelmarsh.

"Warble," said Darlington.

"If you mean sing, I don't," said Kelmarsh.

"If I mean sing, he doesn't," said Darlington, addressing Miss Susy, who was looking from one to another with a comical expression.

"He can talk sense, which is more than you can," she said.

"My mother died when I was young," said Darlington, folding his hands and casting his eyes up.

"It's a pity you didn't die when your mother was young," said Miss Susy.

"Alas!" said Darlington. "Those whom the gods hate die old. I shall live to a hundred and fifty, and act Romeo to the last. 'Parting in such sweet sorrow that I could say good-bye till it were morrow.'" He gave a brief and powerful reminiscence of Henry Irving.

"Don't let's stop the music," said Mrs. Birch, with a touch of anxiety. Not knowing the religious convictions of her new lodger, she wondered whether this conversation was not getting a little too free. A landlady has to be careful. She remembered losing a very good lodger because some one sang the "Star of Bethlehem," which he said was sheer undiluted Popery.

"I've done it!" cried Miss Ringwood, shuffling her two packs of cards together with a triumphant little laugh.

"Miss Ringwood has done it!" said Mr. Darlington, excitedly. "We don't know what she has done, but she has done something which is an achievement, a thing accomplished, a finite result of some unknown cause."

"I've done Patience—for the second time in my life," said Miss Ringwood.

"What an impatient young thing, to be sure!" said the irrepressible Mr. Darlington.

"I could no more play that game," said Susy, "than I could twiddle my thumbs for five hours on the beach at Brighton, which is about the most dreadful boredom I can think of."

"Ah, my dear," said Miss Ringwood, "wait till you get to my age." Then she looked at Susy, and her eyes went across to Phil Darlington. "But perhaps you will play with babies instead. That is a better game."

Darlington laughed and winked at Susy, who blushed furiously and pounced over to Miss Ringwood to clap her hand to the lady's mouth.

"What an improper remark," she said. "Mr. Kelmarsh is quite shocked."

"Rubbish!" said Miss Ringwood. "If we can't mention babies without a blush, we ought to be ashamed

of ourselves. We were all babies once, weren't we?"

Mr. Henderson, who had been preparing to make a remark by sundry little coughs, now spoke for the first time during the evening.

"I do not understand the rules of Patience," he remarked, in his timid shrinking way; "but I am writing a chapter in my big work on the Co-Ordination of Knowledge, showing the influence of games in the evolution of ethics."

"There are no ethics about me when the cards don't go right," said Miss Ringwood. Then she looked up at the old gentleman, and there was a pleasant light in her bright little eyes. "Shall I teach you the game?" she said.

Mr. Henderson was visibly moved. "Why," he said, "that would be very kind, but—but I have never played a game in my life."

"It's never too late to learn," said Miss Ringwood. "Sit down here and I will show you."

Mr. Henderson took a chair by her side, and his hands trembled as he handed the pack of cards to her. Kelmarsh noticed them later, saw how a flush had crept into the white face of the old man, and how his eyes sparkled as Miss Ringwood initiated him into the secrets of the Court cards.

Darlington with many amusing phrases of exaggerated courtesy pressed Mrs. Birch to favour them with a ballad, and the landlady, after a good deal of assumed reluctance, at last consented. She sang "My Mother bids me bind my Hair" in a thin, quavery voice to Miss Sullivan's accompaniment, while Darlington professed to be so overcome with emotion that he sobbed silently in his handkerchief.

After this he retired for a moment from the room, and came back with Mr. Vinnicombe's tall hat, and, in spite of the protests of the retired Civil Servant, used it for an imitation of a gentleman who returns home after a jolly night at the club, to a wife who is waiting for him on the landing. Then he went out of the room again, and, to Kelmarsh's annoyance, came back with the Labour member's soft felt, in which he imitated to perfection an Italian

organ-grinder, a young curate, and a villain in melodrama. Mrs. Birch, Mr. Pond, and Miss Ringwood were highly diverted with this entertainment, and Susy laughed hysterically, especially when Kelmarsh flushed angrily as his hat was twisted into strange contortions. Even Mr. Vinnicombe relaxed into a smile when his own hat had been restored to its peg in the hall, and remarked sententiously that the histrionic art was a very special gift which had its place in the scheme of things.

This profound utterance was followed by extraordinary squeals and gurglings which seemed to come from the hall.

"Good gracious!" said Mr. Vinnicombe, "is that the cat in a fit?"

Mr. Darlington opened the door suddenly and revealed Emily with a handkerchief to her mouth leaning up against the door-post with her hand on her side, and a face purple with suppressed laughter.

She was covered with confusion at being discovered, and was about to make a bolt when Darlington seized her by the arm and dragged her in.

"Here's a pretty thing," he said. "What shall we do with this pretty thing?"

"Em'ly," said her mistress, severely, "retire to the kitchen at once, if you please."

"Oh, let the child stay," said Miss Ringwood. "It's a shame to leave her out in the cold when we're all enjoying ourselves."

Mrs. Birch, after some hesitation, graciously acceded to the petition, and Emily, much abashed, sat on the edge of a chair near the door during the rest of Mr. Darlington's entertainment, which she followed with eyes nearly rolling out of her head, and an ecstatic grin.

Kelmarsh had found a seat by Eunice Johnston, and they talked together quietly.

"Does this style of humour appeal to you?" said Miss Johnston.

"It's rather thin, isn't it?" said Kelmarsh, still sore at the sight of his contorted hat, which was now doing service for Napoleon on the Isle of Elba.

"It makes me very tired," said Miss Johnston. "But if one doesn't come down on Sunday evening, Mrs. Birch takes it as a personal slight."

"What have you been thinking about so deeply?" said Kelmars. "I'm sure your mind has been miles away."

Eunice Johnston coloured a little. "I always see pictures in the fire. . . . I was thinking of my home, and wondering what my people are doing. My mother always used to play Beethoven's sonatas on a Sunday evening. I think they expressed some of her unconscious sadness. They used to make me cry when I was a girl."

"Don't you feel rather lonely in lodgings?" said Kelmars. "I have never had any brothers or sisters, unfortunately, but I'm sure you must miss them."

"Loneliness is the most awful thing to a woman," said Eunice Johnston, with a little thrill in her low voice. "That is one of the penalties of independence, and it's a heavy price to pay." She looked up at Kelmars, and there was a curious wistfulness in her eyes.

"I suppose you are too busy with thoughts and plans to be lonely?" she said. "A man is not so introspective as a woman."

Kelmars did not answer for a moment. He was looking across at Susy, who was playing "Home, Sweet Home," with variations, and it annoyed him to see how Darlington leant over the piano with a hand on her shoulder.

"A man gets moody and egotistical if he lives too much alone," he said. "I think he wants the friendship of woman, especially."

He was thinking of his conversations with Susy Sullivan, and of how the girl had enlivened him by her vivacity. Then he remembered how this other girl, more cultured and refined than Susy, though not physically attractive, had revealed her soul to him in such a startling way a day or two ago, and how she spoke to him now as though they were friends of more than a week's acquaintance. His heart warmed within him, and he felt a kind of tenderness towards both these girls who had entered so recently into his life.

Eunice Johnston answered his last words with a note of eagerness.

"Yes," she said. "I am sure you are right. Men and women help each other. Each has something the other lacks. That is one of the sad things in city life, and of the evils of the social conventions. There are many monks and nuns who have never taken vows."

"You mean to say the sexes are too much separated?" said Kelmars.

"Mother Grundy is still very much alive," said the girl. "And her spitefulness makes men and women terribly afraid of each other. The world will not recognize platonic friendship. It suspects any intimacy between the sexes."

"I hate the ethical standards of the middle-class," said Kelmars. "They are all formed on suspicion or cruelty. I do not believe human nature is naturally vicious. I prefer to believe it is naturally pure. It is tyranny and unnecessary restrictions which create immorality."

"It is splendid to hear you say that," said Miss Johnston. "To my mind platonic friendship between a man and woman is the most beautiful thing in life. But it is absolutely forbidden by modern society."

"Oh, modern society," said Kelmars, with a laugh forgetting that his experience was limited to Burslem and a London boarding-house. "What a rotten bundle of worn-out superstitions, and new stupidities!"

"How courageously you think and speak!" said Eunice Johnston. Her eyes rested on the young man's face, and were kindled with admiration, and with some other kind of light which made him startled by a new beauty in her face which he had not perceived before.

He laughed in an embarrassed way. "I try to be honest to myself," he said. "I hate the policy of the ostrich."

Hate was a word frequently on his lips, though he was not conscious of it.

His conversation with Miss Johnston was interrupted by Miss Susy Sullivan, who, having been asked by Darlington to favour him with her very special song, "The

girl with the babe-blue eyes," started up from the piano suddenly, and in a petulant way declared that as some people in the room were so unsociable she didn't see any fun in the performance.

"I'm off to bed," she said. "That sort of thing makes me tired."

She yawned loudly, and looked across to Kelmarsh and Miss Johnston with an insolent little stare.

"I suppose Mr. Kelmarsh has been discussing the new Bill for the Prevention of Laughter on Sunday."

"Yes," said Darlington. "I understand the Labour party is pledged to the total abolition of innocent amusements."

Susy laughed satirically and flounced out of the room.

"Vulgar little creature!" said Miss Johnston, in a low voice.

Kelmarsh was hurt. It was the first time he had seen Susy reveal a trace of ill-temper, and he was sorry to be the cause of it. Perhaps he *had* been too indifferent to her entertainment, but that fellow Darlington got upon his nerves. He was so desperately determined to be funny.

Susy's exit broke up the social evening; and Mr. Vinnicombe wound up his watch with the remark that time waits for no man.

Miss Ringwood had now revealed to Mr. Henderson the most scientific methods of playing Patience, and packed up the cards, while the old gentleman expressed his heart-felt thanks for her instruction.

"God bless me," he said, with a little start of surprise, "it is already eleven, and I have been in bed by half-past ten for twenty-five years back!"

"Ah," said Miss Ringwood. "Patience makes the clock go round."

Kelmarsh said good night to Miss Johnston. For some reason her eyes faltered before his.

"I am so glad you are staying here," she said.

In his own room Kelmarsh thought over the incidents of the evening, and he pondered over the contrast between Miss Johnston and Miss Sullivan. Each of them interested

him intensely, but the seriousness of the one was less piquant than the sauciness of the other.

"Poor little Susy!" he said. "I'm afraid I've offended her."

Then he heard her throw her boots out of the bedroom door, and he wished he could have caught a glimpse of her bare arm, and of her red-gold hair glinting in the candle-light.

XIV

KELMARSH went downstairs next morning at about half-past eleven to get some hot water for shaving, after doing some writing in his bedroom. In spite of the almost tearful protests of Mrs. Birch, and the indignation of Em'ly herself, he made a point of waiting on himself as much as possible in order to save the queer little drudge from climbing the stairs too often.

"As if I weren't made for it," said Em'ly, to whom such considerate behaviour was not only baffling, but annoying. "If the lodgers take to doin' their own work, I may as well go to the Union at onst. Mrs. Birch don't pay me five bob a week for writin' potry."

On the way up with his water-can, he saw Miss Susy Sullivan fetching in the high-heeled boots which she threw out regularly every night. She was in a pink dressing-gown with her hair down her shoulders, and looked more of a child than ever.

"You do get up betimes," she said to Kelmarsh. "You always wake me up out of my beauty sleep when you pull up your Venetian blinds."

"I am very sorry if that is so," said Kelmarsh. "I didn't know I made such a noise."

"Oh, it's good for my soul," said Miss Sullivan, cheerfully.

Kelmarsh hesitated. "I'm afraid I *was* rather unsociable last night," he said, somewhat irrelevantly. "Will you forgive me—especially as I honestly enjoyed your singing?"

"Flatterer!" said Miss Sullivan, with an exaggerated coquetry. "I suppose you want an apology from me for being so rude? But you won't get it. The way you carried on with that Johnston girl was simply shocking."

"Nonsense!" said Kelmarsh, flushing.

"Oh, all right!" said Miss Sullivan. "I'm not a spoil-sport."

"It's ridiculous to talk like that," said Kelmarsh. "We couldn't stare at each other without speaking."

"You couldn't spare a word for me anyhow," said the girl, pouting.

"You were too much taken up with Darlington," said Kelmarsh, with a little touch of malice.

It was the girl's turn to colour up. "Darlington!" she said scornfully. "I don't throw my pearls before low comedy gentlemen." She opened her bedroom door wider. "If you're conversational, you needn't talk in the passage."

"Thanks very much," said Kelmarsh, "but I've got to shave."

"I want your opinion of my new hat," she said. "It's what they call a creation. If you have tears, prepare to shed them now."

She skipped into her room, and Kelmarsh, hesitating for a moment on the threshold, followed her. He was abashed by the appearance of her room and would have retreated, but the girl, who was rummaging under the dressing-table, called out, "Don't be shy."

The bed in which she had slept was still unmade, and over the back rail hung the frock with tucks and frills which she had worn last evening, and a pair of long black stockings. Disorder reigned in the room. On a small table beside the bed was a dog's-eared novelette, a candle guttered with grease, and bits of orange-peel. Two wet face-towels and the girl's nightgown had been thrown on the floor, and the dressing-table was littered with

torn letters, hair-pins, half-burnt matches, and curious little sticks which Kelmarsh afterwards knew to be grease-paint. Over the mantelpiece a great number of photographs of young men and women, obviously actors and actresses, and some of them signed "Yours lovingly," and "Yours till death," were pinned to the wall-paper. On the washstand was a basin of soapy water.

It seemed to Kelmarsh an extraordinary and disconcerting thing that she should have asked him into such a room, but her total lack of embarrassment showed that to her it was natural and not a subject for remark.

"Now, then," she said, putting on a big straw hat with pink roses before the looking-glass, "if this doesn't knock you, I don't know what will."

She turned round and dropped him a curtsy. "Très bon ton, n'est-ce-pas?" she said.

Kelmarsh regarded it gravely. "It seems to me the most atrocious thing," he said. "Perfectly frightful."

The girl gasped. "Well!" she said, "you're what they call a candid friend! Why—my dear, beautiful boy, that cost me eighteen shillings and sixpence. Nearly a whole week's wages!"

"If I were you," said Kelmarsh, "I would pay a pound not to be seen alive in it. Those roses positively curdle the whites of my eyes."

"I'll curdle the marrow in your bones," said Miss Sullivan, heatedly, "if you say any more such things! It's a perfect love of a hat!"

"Sorry I spoke," said Kelmarsh; "but I must tell the truth."

"Oh, I forgot," said Susy, scornfully. "You're the young man who never told a lie."

Then in a sudden passion she tore the roses from her hat and flung them into the fireplace. When she turned round towards the dressing-table Kelmarsh saw that there were tears in her eyes.

"I say," he said, "I hope you're not really offended? I am sorry you did that."

"Good morning, Mr. Kelmarsh," said Susy, with acid

sweetness. "Perhaps you'll shut the door after you. It's rather draughty, isn't it?"

Kelmarsh hesitated and then walked to the door rather sheepishly.

"That comes of being honest," he said.

"Yes," said Susy. "It's a mistake, I assure you. Personally, I hate honest people. Don't forget what I told you about the door."

"I am really awfully sorry," said Kelmarsh.

He waited for a moment, but Susy had sat down at the dressing-table and was brushing out her gold hair with something like ferocity. So he went out and shut the door, realizing that he had made a fool of himself.

Later in the morning he was relieved to hear her singing cheerily on the staircase. But he was not so pleased when he heard Phil Darlington calling out in his metallic voice—

"Come along, sweet lady! The day is far spent, and the sun is high in the heavens."

From his window, Kelmarsh watched them go into the street together. Darlington was in a light tweed suit with a bowler hat, very much at an angle, and he twirled his cane jauntily. Susy, not in a straw hat with pink roses, but in a grey hat with a feather, held her skirts rather high as she crossed the road. Kelmarsh saw that she looked up at the man and laughed.

"What a low cad that fellow is!" he muttered.

XV

THE Caxton Hall, Westminster, was invaded by women long before the time of the much-advertised meeting of the Women's Freedom League. Although no unconstitutional demonstration had been announced or threatened, strong bodies of police were

drawn up round the hall, and half a dozen mounted policemen sat motionless on their horses at the corner of the street, while their inspector patrolled the vicinity. A foreigner, coming by chance upon this night scene, might have imagined that a meeting of dangerous revolutionists was in progress, and that public law and order might at any time be broken by a sanguinary struggle. A large crowd of men and women surged on the footways and in the road, and thronged each side of the canopy above the entrance. As cabs and carriages and motor-cars streamed up in a continual procession, and the faces of well-known Suffragettes were recognized by the mob, there was a good deal of noisy booing and laughter, above which came the monotonous shouts of the police: "Move on, there. Move along, please."

Kelmarsh arrived at the Hall half-way through the meeting, and, showing his ticket to the lady stewards, was immediately ushered along a side gallery which led on to the platform. He took the front seat pointed out to him, with an uneasy sense of self-consciousness, which quickly disappeared as he realized that he was not an object of special notice. Down below him in the body of the hall was row upon row of women, their faces turned upwards towards that platform. The hall was brilliantly lighted, and the effect of all those women-faces in the full glare of electricity was bewildering and astonishing. At first, Kelmarsh, staring before him, was only aware of the general mass of these hundreds of white faces, of hundreds of pairs of eyes, of feathers and flowers in the women's hats, of soft dresses which seemed blended into waves of drapery, which rustled faintly like the distant swishing of the sea on a pebbly beach as the audience was stirred into momentary gusts of excitement. Then, in a little while he distinguished individual faces, and found himself studying different types of feminine physiognomy. Some of the women were elderly, with white or grey hair under black hats, and with sharp features and thin lips. Some of them, on the contrary, were mere girls with soft curling hair, and pretty piquant faces with fresh complexion and bright, sparkling eyes—astonishingly brilliant eyes as the

electric lights dazzled them. Others were plain, hard-featured women of middle age, with determined mouths and resolute expression. Many were in evening dress, and Kelmarsh was astonished by this display of bare arms, of white necks, and bosoms. It was a new experience to him, for until then he had never seen a single woman in full evening dress, and for a moment or two it made him feel uncomfortable and distressed. Yet his eyes were charmed by two or three of these women who sat in the front row. One was a superb young creature with an aureole of pale gold hair. She sat in a billow of white lace, her full throat and smooth white chest revealed as she lifted her head to look up at the speaker on the platform. Kelmarsh studied the creamy whiteness of her skin, the exquisite rose-tints of her cheeks, the perfectly modelled nose, and the proud curve of her lips, and the full round chin. It seemed to him that he saw the beauty of young womanhood for the first time. There were other faces which attracted his eyes—faces full of a singular sweetness and refinement, wonderfully delicate and expressive, and among them were women of coarser mould, fat and unmistakably ugly, or thin, haggard women with pinched features and weary eyes.

For a few moments while this vision of women absorbed his interest he was unaware of the people amongst whom he sat, and the shrill, swift, passionate words of the speaker had no meaning for him. Then he shifted in his seat and looked about the platform. One of the first faces he saw was that of Miss Eunice Johnston, whose eyes were fixed upon him. She smiled at him, inclining her head a little, and the animation of her usually tired face startled him.

He bowed nervously, his lips moving with a few unuttered words of greeting. She smiled again and then turned her face towards the speaker. Kelmarsh also looked at the woman speaking, and for the first time heard her words with understanding. She was a little frail woman, quite young, with her brown hair parted in the middle and looped loosely behind. She wore a short grey skirt and a white flannel blouse with rather

short sleeves, and as she spoke she leant forward, with one foot in advance, and emphasized her words with passionate gestures, and with glowing eyes in which there seemed to burn two fires.

She was denouncing the attitude of men towards the movement for women's freedom, and was fierce in her epithets. The words "cowards," "bullies," "selfish tyrants," "task-masters," and "sensualists" rang in Kelmarsh's ears, startling him with their violence. Every now and then, at the end of a dramatic sentence, the audience broke in upon her flood of passionate words by shrill cries and sharp volleys of applause. Sometimes at some fierce stroke of satire they laughed, and the sound of this high-pitched women's laughter was very strange.

When she sat down, flushed with excitement and panting with exhaustion, a great wave of enthusiasm passed through the crowd of women, and there was again that curious swishing noise of draperies, and the crackle and flutter of many programmes being waved.

The little woman was followed by a tall, elderly, stately lady in a black dress, with perfectly white hair below a small black widow's cap. She had regular features, thin and refined, and there was an expression of sweetness and humour about her lips. She, too, was received with enthusiasm, and it was some minutes before she could speak. Then Kelmarsh's interest was intensified by the sound of a clear, silvery, exquisitely modulated voice speaking in quiet words perfectly articulated, so that every syllable seemed to carry to the end of the hall.

She spoke of the ages of suffering through which women had passed. That suffering had not been vain or purposeless. It was a part of the divine scheme of evolution. Through those long ages women had been sternly disciplined, they had drunk constantly of the cup of pain. They had learnt to suffer without complaint, and the courage of women in suffering was very great, greater than the active heroism of men. Then gradually the spirit of divine discontent had come upon them, the wistfulness of womanhood had grown into a passionate yearning for things at first but dimly understood. It

was the struggle of the chrysalis to get free of its shell and to rise to a higher and freer life. Women's hearts were now beating against their prison bars. They sought an escape from their old narrow life, not for the satisfaction of selfish desires, not for the gratification of wild and wanton instincts, but for the sake of a wider scope of work and services. They had been too long in the fetters of unjust laws and social superstitions which restricted their energies and cramped their natural instincts. The work of the Women's Freedom League was to hasten the great revolution of women, and to create a new society when women should live in liberty and justice, free to carry out their highest impulses, free to devote themselves to the service of humanity, free to remedy social evils with knowledge gained by suffering and pain. It was said by their enemies that the emancipation of women would lead to their abandonment of religion and morality. That was a lie which must be nailed to the counter. The ideals of women's freedom did not mean the loss of religious faith, nor the breaking of moral laws. It was essentially an evolution towards a faith inspired by purity of spirit and less corrupted by the pettiness and grossness, and ignorant superstitions of the old *régime* of enslaved womanhood; and it would lead not to the abandonment of moral law, but to the elevation of morality by purifying the relations of the sexes, and placing men and women upon a moral equality. Men shall no longer sin with impunity, leaving the suffering to women. Women in finding their liberty shall secure justice also.

Her silvery voice became silent, and she sat down with quiet dignity, her white face flushing a little as the audience cheered her with a shrill clamour of applause.

Several other speakers followed, and Kelmarsch was astonished and filled with admiration by the real eloquence, the strong character, and the passionate sincerity of these advocates of women's suffrage. Some of them were evidently working women in poor circumstances, and some of them were a little hysterical, and uncultured in their method of oratory, but on the whole they were distinguished by high intelligence, a sense of logic, and in

some cases by a strongly developed sense of humour.

A voice whispered over his shoulder: "The President will ask you to speak next. I hope you will consent."

He flushed vividly as he turned round and saw Miss Eunice Johnston bending over his chair.

"I really beg of you not to ask me," he stammered in a whisper, "I am utterly unprepared . . . and I have nothing to say."

"I am sure you have many things to say," said Eunice Johnston in a low voice. "Please, please!"

She put her hand on his shoulder, and her grey eyes glowed with excitement.

"I had no idea of such a thing," said Kelmarsh, much distressed. "You must excuse me, really."

"No, no," said the girl. "For the sake of the cause!"

She went back to her place, afraid of giving him time for another refusal. Kelmarsh sat with one foot nervously tapping the platform until an old lady next to him begged him not to distract her attention. He wished in his heart that he had not come to the meeting, and then, in spite of his wish, there came to him a strong desire that he might have the pluck to get on his feet and say something to all these women before him. It was the temptation that comes to a young man who has tasted the joys of debate and oratory.

XVI

THE struggle in the young Labour member's mind was not allowed to last long. He went quite white for a moment when the lady president said in a clear voice—

"I have much pleasure in calling upon Mr. Richard Kelmarsh, the new Labour member for Burslem, to speak a few words on behalf of women's suffrage."

Kelmarsh rose to his feet, feeling very weak about the knees, his heart thumping painfully, and with a loud "singing" in the ears.

He was only half conscious of the clapping that greeted him, and of a thousand eyes staring up at him with interest and curiosity. He heard a girl's voice say in low and distinct tones below the platform, "He is very good-looking, isn't he?" and then he became aware that the audience had settled again into deep silence. With a strong effort he pulled himself together, and then, at the sound of his own voice, he lost his nervousness, and his old experience of public speaking came back to him and gave him courage.

He looked very boyish as he stood on the edge of the platform, with the electric candelabra above sending a flood of light upon his face. He held the lapels of his blue serge coat lightly. His hair waved a little over his forehead, and his sensitive, clear-cut face, with its serious eyes and firm mouth, was slightly raised.

He began quickly by referring to the previous speakers, and to the impression they had made upon him by their eloquence and their arguments. Sitting there, one man among many women, there had gradually come to him a new revelation of the spirit behind the movement of modern womanhood. Whether it was right or wrong, whether the granting of woman's suffrage would lead to reforms or abuses, he was now convinced that it was a spiritual force which could not be checked. When the leaders of the intelligent classes of women gathered in that hall, and representing thousands of their sisters outside, spoke with such passionate sincerity demanding freedom, he realized from his knowledge of history that their voices could not be silenced by the scornfulness of men, nor by the indifference or antagonism of other women still faithful to the old *régime*. It seemed to him that this new ideal of liberty among women was like the spirit that had moved the French people before the Revolution. Rousseau's "Social Contract" had been scorned as a madman's dream; but it was read secretly by village carpenters after their day's work, and by poor Parisian clerks in their lonely lodgings, until its message had stirred

many hearts with the conviction of a new gospel. Diderot and D'Alembert and other intellectuals questioned the old laws dividing class from class, and the old theories of Government and the divine right of kings, and their destructive analysis aroused the hostility of tyrannical forces which tried to stifle free-thought and stamp out the new ideals of liberty and justice. In the *salons* society discussed the theories light-heartedly, never believing that they would cause a change, and in those *salons* the old *régime* flirted and danced and talked scandal as though they were secure from all annoyance, ignorant that in the taverns and workshops those new ideals were breeding passionate thoughts, and urging men and women to passionate impulses, which at a signal would sweep away in a great resistless tide of destruction the old order of France, and the whole scheme of society as it had previously existed.

So it seemed to him that the spirit of liberty among modern women had a force which would shatter many old creeds and superstitions. As yet, it was hardly taken seriously. It was discussed in drawing-rooms, he supposed, as people would discuss a new problem play; but he could understand, from what he had heard and seen that night, that among many working women, and in the very heart of the nation's womanhood, there was a silent revolution taking place which would gradually, or perhaps suddenly and swiftly, become a resistless and overwhelming power. He had heard one phrase that night which he would not soon forget. One of the speakers had alluded to the divine discontent of women. Through all the ages of the world it had been the divine discontent of the spirit which had been the motive power of all progress and reform, and the very first cause of evolution. He believed in discontent, for it was only by that spirit that humanity was always attaining a higher level of happiness and comfort.

And he believed that when women had the liberty they now demanded, it would not lead, as in the French Revolution, to anarchy. He was convinced, rather, that it might save the world from another revolution, in which

blood would not be spared. He meant the uprising of the lowest classes of labour against the idle rich and the unscrupulous capitalists. The gulf between the classes was becoming wider year by year. Every year some people were becoming richer, and some poorer. Soon the deadly contrasts of life would have but one result. The forces of labour would revolt against a social system which gave them only the starvation wage. There was but one safeguard against an economic revolution which would not be made with rose-water. It was the new influence of women. If they were allowed to enter public life, if they were able to make laws as well as being compelled to obey them, if their intelligence and emotion entered into the political and social government of the nation, he believed that their instincts of justice and mercy, their sweet sanity, their natural hate of cruelty, their knowledge of the laws of health, their love of children, and their power as teachers, as mothers, and as makers of men, would create a new heaven and a new earth. Not their sex alone would gain by liberty. Men would share their emancipation and their glory.

Kelmarsh, in speaking these words, had begun on a quiet note, but his sentences came quickly as he went on, and his voice, naturally clear and expressive, thrilled with an emotion which flushed his grave face and set the fires alight in his grey eyes. Reported in cold type, his words seem commonplace, but they were lifted into a real height of oratory by the thrill of voice and the impressive gestures, and by a personality which appealed to women. The stamp of the self-made man was upon him, and evident by the slight Midland burr in his speech ; but Nature had been kind to him in giving him a refinement and expressiveness of face above his class, and his ideas, gained by lonely thought and long hours of reading, were sufficiently original to command attention. His youth, too, and a trace of timidity were on his side, while his position as a Labour member of Parliament gave an additional interest to his figure on the platform. He had not come with a well-defined reputation which he had to support. He was a stranger and an unknown quantity to women who

were familiar with most of the political men who "count." It was a maiden speech, and the element of surprise favoured him.

When he sat down the whole audience of women rose and cheered him wildly and almost hysterically, so that he was dazed by the noise of their enthusiasm. A lady in the front row plucked a bunch of violets from her breast and threw them on to the platform at his feet. Instantly three other women followed her example, to the sound of renewed cries and ripples of pleasant laughter. Kelmarsh was utterly abashed by the ovation. He had the healthy Englishman's dislike of being made a fool of, and the ordinary young man's self-consciousness and shyness among women. He wished at that moment that the earth might swallow him up.

He rose to his feet, bowing awkwardly and stammering a few words. Then he turned and hurriedly left the platform. The corridors were deserted, and he hurried down them to the entrance, perspiring hotly, realizing almost for the first moment that he had made a great "hit," but extraordinarily disconcerted by the effect of his speech.

"Good God!" he said. "What a fool I must have looked! If only some fellows at Burslem could have seen me when those women were shying their infernal flowers at me!"

He laughed nervously at the thought. Then, as he reached the entrance, he heard footsteps hurrying towards him, and a panting voice said—

"Oh, Mr. Kelmarsh, it was splendid of you—splendid!"

It was Eunice Johnston, who came up breathless, her eyes burning with excitement. She took hold of one of his hands and pressed it with both her own.

"How can I ever thank you?" she said. "You have become one of our leaders. . . . We shall all look to you now as a champion."

"I say," he answered, still stinging with the memory of deep embarrassment, "why on earth did those four women throw flowers at me? I never felt such a fool in my life."

He was almost angry with her, and she was disconcerted by his show of temper.

"I am so sorry," she said. "It was perhaps a little hysterical of them. But the flowers were their symbols of homage. They recognized a noble spirit."

Kelmarsh was appeased. After all, there was no need to get into such a fantigue, and the words were incense to his soul.

"Did I say anything sensible?" he said. "I haven't the faintest idea what I said, I was called on so suddenly——"

"You moved us deeply," said Eunice Johnston, with evident sincerity. "And it was not so much what you said as how you said it. We could see that you spoke from your heart."

The prig in him asserted itself for a moment. "I trust I spoke with conviction," he said. "I always strive to say the truth that is in me."

Eunice Johnston devoured him with her eyes. "You will be one of our heroes," she said.

Kelmarsh smiled and walked out into the roadway, where the crowd still waited.

"Which way are you going?" he said. "I must get back to the House."

"I should be grateful for an escort through the mob," said Eunice Johnston.

As he went down the steps she laid a hand on his arm, and he piloted her through a mass of people thrust back by policemen. They stared at Kelmarsh and the girl with curiosity, and passed remarks upon them with the evident intention of being overheard.

"Is that a suffragette in trousers?" said one man, with a noisy laugh.

"Looks like a social reformer, don't 'e?"

"The young lidy is converting him. Wish I had a nice gal to do the same by me!"

Kelmarsh thrust his way through them silently, and Eunice Johnston held fast to his arm. When they had got free of the crowd, she gave a deep breath of relief.

"Those are the people we have to convince," she said. "It will take a lot to educate them."

"They do not represent the working people," said Kelmarsh, always eager in his defence of democracy. "These are the hangers-on and parasites of society—the flunkey and sporting class."

It was only a few minutes' walk to Westminster. As they got near to the Houses of Parliament, Kelmarsh was stirred as usual by the beauty of the great buildings rising into a clear night sky with a half-moon above resting on a fleecy cloud, wonderful in their masses of black shadow with white lacework of stone colour, the light touching them with a soft glamour.

"I am always haunted by the ghosts of Time when I see the House like this by night," said Kelmarsh. Then he added, looking up at the clock tower: "They are discussing the Estimates to-night, and there are big scenes going on." He laughed. "How many big scenes the old moon has looked down upon! She seems to smile at these little emotions and futilities of humanity."

"Not futilities," said Miss Johnston, seriously. "The destinies of many men and women are decided here."

"When one sees the machine working," said Kelmarsh, "it takes away from the romance of the thing. It is mainly a House of Humbug."

At the entrance of Palace Yard he said good night to her. She clasped his hand warmly.

"Again I thank you," she said, "from my heart."

"It is nothing," said Kelmarsh, carelessly, though he was still stirred by the excitement of the evening. "I spoke only a few foolish words."

The light from a lamp fell upon the face of Eunice Johnston, and he saw a curious haunting look in her eyes. But her words were commonplace.

"Please accept my thanks," she said. "Good night."

She turned and walked in the direction of Charing Cross, and as he walked into the House of Commons he wondered at the unknown secrets in the girl's mind, and pitied her loneliness.

XVII

A CONDENSED version of Kelmarsh's speech at the Caxton Hall was reported in the daily papers, and the incident of the women throwing flowers on to the platform at his feet was exaggerated grotesquely. In his own halfpenny morning journal Kelmarsh read that "the young Labour member, whose singularly beautiful and boyish face, and whose brilliant and if somewhat hysterical rhetoric had bewitched all the ladies in the audience, sat motionless while a hurricane of flowers descended upon him. It was 'roses all the way.' The platform was carpeted with soft petals, and some of them touched his hair with fragrant caresses. He looked like some Greek hero of the Olympic games being garlanded by the women of Athens."

Kelmarsh scrunched the paper fiercely in his hands. He was made to look supremely ridiculous, and to a young man's self-conceit ridicule is a venomous poison. He would have smarted still more sorely if he had seen then, as he did later, the special description "by our own representative" in the "Daily Mail," in which he was nicknamed "Kiss-me-Kelmarsh."

This was brought to his notice by the reporter of another paper, who called at the lodging-house during the morning, and sent up his card and the newspaper cutting requesting the favour of a brief interview. Kelmarsh, wishing that all journalists might be massacred in a Fleet Street "pogrom," sent down word by Em'ly that he declined to see any newspaper representatives. Em'ly delivered the same message to three other men who arrived in a body on the doorstep. They argued the matter with her, and one of them offered her half a sovereign if she would take him to Mr. Kelmarsh's room. This aroused the girl's righteous indignation.

"'Ow dare you hinsult me!" she cried. "D'ye think I'm to be corrupted by gold?"

"Would silver make any difference?" said the young man, with an inquiring smile.

Em'ly slammed the door in his face. "Low creatures!" she said when she reported the incident to the young Labour member. "I suppose they call themselves gentlemen. Board-school boys, I call 'em!"

Mr. Vinnicombe was in the dining-room when Kelmarsh came downstairs. To the young man's annoyance, he saw that the old gentleman was reading the "Daily Mail."

Mr. Vinnicombe got up and gave him a gruff good morning.

"I have been reading about that silly business at the Caxton Hall last night," he said. "My dear fellow, how could you have allowed yourself to be led away by a pack of foolish women? It'll ruin your career. You've damned yourself. That's what you've done, and I'm sorry for it."

"I prefer not to discuss the subject," said Kelmarsh, stiffly.

"Perhaps it's as well," said the old gentleman. "I should be loath to lose my temper."

Phil Darlington met Kelmarsh in the passage and greeted him with a comical smile.

"Had a good time with the girls last night, didn't you? I don't blame you—they're dear sweet things."

Kelmarsh would have liked to knock the smile off the man's face with his fist, but he restrained himself with an effort, and went on brushing his hat without a word.

"Care to come out and have a drink?" said Darlington, who seemed determined to be friendly. "I always have a soul-searcher at eleven."

"Thanks," said Kelmarsh. "I'm a teetotaler."

"Are you indeed?" said Darlington, sympathetically.

"I'm sorry to hear that. Doctor's orders?"

"No," said Kelmarsh. "Principles."

"Principles?" said Darlington. "Never heard of 'em. They're not in my line."

He went out whistling, much to Kelmarsh's relief.

Miss Susy Sullivan came downstairs three at a time. She was dressed for going out and seemed in high spirits,

and to have forgotten her temper with Kelmarsh at their last interview in her bedroom.

"Good boy," she said. "I have read your little speech last night. How well you must have looked with those flowers round your brow! Would that I had been there!"

"I shall never hear the last of those flowers," said Kelmarsh, laughing in spite of himself at her impudence. "If you say anything more about them I shall be quarrelsome."

"Not a word," said Miss Sullivan. "Get out of the way of that glass and let me squint at myself."

She patted her front hair before the looking-glass in the hat-stand.

"I say, though," she said, "you seem to know a good deal about women's souls for such a young man. Where did you pick up all your knowledge?"

"Well, you have taught me something," said Kelmarsh, smiling.

"Now you're getting impertinent," said the girl. "And I won't stand that from anyone less than an actor-manager or my own agent."

"Which way are you going?" said Kelmarsh. "I want to make you an *amende honorable*."

"Good gracious! What's that?" said Miss Sullivan. "Something good to eat?"

"No," said Kelmarsh; "it's a hat."

Susy looked at him with real surprise. "Do I hear you mention the word 'hat'?" she said. "If so, you've discovered the secret of my soul."

"I made you spoil one," said Kelmarsh, "so I've got to get you another."

He said the words carelessly, but the truth was he had thought for an hour on the subject before getting up. It was curious how the girl came into his thoughts, and he was really full of remorse about his brutality to her.

She gave a little squeal of laughter. "My," she said, "you are a funny boy! If you think I'm going to let you buy me a new hat, you don't know my haughty and indomitable pride! But I'll tell you what we will do. We'll go and look at some."

"All right," said Kelmarsh. "Come on."

"My word!" said Miss Susy. "This is a wild and delirious adventure. Who said hats?"

As they crossed the street—Susy with her skirts tucked up above her ankles, and her hand affectionately on his arm—Kelmarsh remembered with a sudden twinge how he had seen her like this with Darlington. He did not like to think that she could be so friendly with another man, and with such a cad as that. He would have preferred to think that he was specially privileged by her free-and-easy conversation. Then he thought how absurd that was, how unreasonable, and he wished he had had a wider experience of women.

"Is that fellow Darlington a great friend of yours?" he asked carelessly.

"Oh, so, so," said the girl. "He is one of the boys, you know."

"What do you mean by that?" said Kelmarsh.

"Oh, one of the crowd. I have been on tour with him twice. He was always a good sport. He plays cricket."

"What has that got to do with it?"

The girl laughed. "What an innocent you are!" she said. "And yet you're a member of Parliament."

"I suppose a knowledge of slang is not necessary for common-sense legislation," said Kelmarsh, rather nettled.

"Ignorance of slang is ignorance of life," said Miss Susy Sullivan. She was rather pleased with this remark. "How's that for an epigram?" she said.

Kelmarsh stopped outside a milliner's establishment in the Tottenham Court Road.

"How's this for a bonnet-shop?" he said.

Susy devoured the window with her eyes. "They're what I call chaste!" she said, looking at the array of stylish hats. "My, shouldn't I knock the girls in one of those!"

"Let's go in," said Kelmarsh.

"Now, look here, don't be rash," said Susy, clutching him by the arm. "I lose all moral sense among hats."

Kelmarsh laughed. "I must gauge the depths of feminine character," he said. He plunged into the shop,

and she hung on his arm half resisting, but not too obstinate in her resistance.

For half an hour she enjoyed herself without restraint, and tried on at least fifty hats before a long pier-glass, to the despair of the milliner's young woman, but to the amusement of Kelmarsh, who smiled at her coquetry and excited comments. He noticed also that she was taken with the hats that shocked him most by their hideous vulgarity.

"Don't I look a duchess in this?" she said, surveying herself in a monstrous thing with red feathers.

"Take it off," said Kelmarsh. "It's worse than the one we quarrelled about."

"Oh, it's perfectly sweet," said Susy. "Any manager would give me an engagement on the spot if I flaunted this in his eyes."

"I should lose all respect for you," said Kelmarsh. "This blue thing with the cornflowers is not so outrageous. It matches your eyes."

"Oh, does it?" said Susy, blushing a little. "I wonder how you know *that*?"

She tried it on, and the effect pleased her. "It's rather saucy, isn't it?" she said.

"I should have that," said Kelmarsh. "You couldn't do better."

"Well, it's your day out," said Susy.

While the milliner's young lady, who, recognizing the character of her customer, had long abandoned all advice, was packing up the treasure, Susy whispered to Kelmarsh—

"Look here, I'm going to pay, you know, and don't you make any mistake about it."

"Nonsense," said Kelmarsh; "it's a debt I owe you."

Miss Sullivan pulled out a little leather purse. "I may be giddy," she said, "but I'm not dishonest."

With an extremely resolute air she opened a purse and pulled out two shillings, a threepenny bit, and five pennies.

"Goodness gracious!" she said, "I'm broke to the world."

"Well, that decides the matter, doesn't it?" said Kelmarsh, laughing. He pulled out a sovereign.

"Do you think that will square the deal?"

Miss Susy was in some confusion. "If I don't look an idiot!" she said. "And after my haughtiness! Well, you'll have to let me pay you back."

"My dear girl," said Kelmarsh, "you don't realize this is a debt of honour. I shall never forget my remorse when you tore those roses out of that straw."

"Well, I confess I was in a bit of a tiff," said Susy. "Anyhow, you've been behaving like the young duke in musical comedy, and I'm beginning to like Labour members. Are there any more round about?"

Having given the address of the boarding-house, and pocketed one shilling and sixpence change, with a sudden twinge at the thought that for a desperately poor man this was a little game not to be played every day, however pleasant, Kelmarsh left the shop with her, and she took his arm again, squeezing it a little with her gloved hand. She seemed a child to him, this little actress with the free-and-easy ways, and to a sisterless man who had not been intimate with any woman, her companionship was pleasant in a London street. She was now in the highest spirits, and arm-in-arm they studied the shop windows in the Tottenham Court Road, Susy pouring out her peculiar philosophy of life, which was a mixture of conventional sentiment and worldly cynicism touched always by a piquant humour. She insisted on standing him treat in a bun-shop, and stuffed him with tartlets, many of which she ate with the heartiest appetite.

Kelmarsh discovered some boyishness in himself as he sat opposite her sparkling eyes and listened to her prattle. For a while life did not seem so terribly serious to him, and he forgot some of his sense of responsibility as a reformer of social evils. It was a surprise which pleased him. He felt that he had never tasted such delicious milk or such extremely enjoyable tarts, and for the first time in London, as he watched the crowd passing on the pavement outside, he did not feel a sense of isolation, or regard them as shadows in a grey world of dreams.

He caught sight of his face in a mirror, and hardly recognized the smiling young man in it.

Susy herself noticed the alteration in his looks. "My word!" she said. "Shopping has put a colour in your cheeks. I believe there is a little human nature underneath your noble principles. If I were you I would get rid of some of those principles of yours. I am sure they make you old before your time."

"I believe you think I'm a horrible prig," said Kelmarsh.

"Um, um," said Susy, with a funny little expression which made him laugh again.

They separated at Charing Cross. It had taken them three hours to get there from Guildford Street.

"A thousand thanks," said Miss Sullivan, in a gracious way. "I trust we shall meet again." She put her head on one side and went off into a little peal of laughter, which astonished the passers-by and made them smile, with the infectiousness of merriment.

"Every day, I hope," said Kelmarsh.

"Oh, familiarity breeds contempt," said Susy. She ran into the middle of the swirling traffic as if she were intent on committing immediate suicide, but the policeman, with slightly relaxed lips, held his hand up and stopped a line of omnibuses, motor-cars, cabs, and broughams. The world waited for Miss Susannah Sullivan to cross.

In the House, Kelmarsh wrapped himself again in his cloak of reserve and responsibility which he had doffed for an idle hour or two with a laughing child. He went to room No. 9, where he was serving as a member of the Select Committee on Pauper Relief. Dunstan, who was the chairman, grinned over at him good-naturedly, and he noticed a smile on the faces of some of his fellow-members. His quick ears caught the whispered words of "Kiss-me-Kelmarsh," and he reddened at the odious nickname.

After the committee had risen, Dunstan came over to him and congratulated him on his speech of the previous evening.

"I suppose the newspaper comments have touched you up a bit," he said. "Don't you mind 'em. They won't

do you any 'arm. We all have to go through that sort of thing. It takes the self-conceit out of a fellow, and is the best training for a public man."

"I'm afraid it hits me rather hard," said Kelmarsh. "I hate to think I made a fool of myself."

"Bosh," said Dunstan. "That's all my eye and my elbow. You spoke sensibly enough for a youngster with about as much experience of women as a Franciscan friar. As for making a fool of yourself, it's the very best thing you can do. That's what helps the world on a bit. Fellows who are afraid to make fools of 'emselves never get near being wise men."

XVIII

EUNICE JOHNSTON did not neglect the education of the Labour member who had spoken with such success at the Caxton Hall. Nor did she allow him to rest upon the laurels gained by a single achievement. She waylaid him in the passages, or tapped at the door of his bed-sitting-room, and begged him to read various booklets and leaflets published by the Women's Social and Political Union, the Women's Freedom League, and other associations for promoting Women's Enfranchisement. It seemed to Kelmarsh that she had an inexhaustible supply of these publications. She carried them in her muff, and when she opened her little hand-bag, which was inseparable from her, they seemed to jump out at him. Going down to breakfast he would find a leaflet under his plate, and often she would push one under his door when he was absent at the House, or sleeping in the morning. She seemed to have converted Em'ly—this indomitable little creature was above all bribery and corruption—for sometimes he would find booklets in his boots and leaflets in his clean shirts. At first he read

them diligently, and with real interest, in omnibuses and in the smoking-room of the House of Commons, or while he was shaving in his room. But the time came when his eyes revolted at the sight of "Votes for Women" in big bold type at the head of a printed page, and having absorbed all the arguments in the favour of women's suffrage and most of the facts and figures bearing on the subject, he discovered with something like a guilty shock that he was using the leaflets for wiping the soap off his razors, and dropping many of the booklets unread into his waste-paper basket.

But this was not a sign that he was losing interest in the subject of women's emancipation. On the contrary, it had become one of his "principles" which Susy gibed at so often, and as his knowledge of the problems of poverty and social evils in London increased, he became more firm in his belief that the influence of women in public life would be a powerful aid in the cause of reform.

Eunice Johnston did not bring only political tracts to his room. She had a habit now of stealing into his room when he was away, and filling his vases with fresh flowers. When he first noticed this he thought Susy Sullivan must be the good fairy, but upon questioning Em'ly he discovered the real donor of these good gifts.

Em'ly had a peculiar smile on her smutty face when she told him, and with a touch of annoyance he asked what she found so amusing.

"Something struck my funny-bone," said Em'ly. "I'm often like that. Don't you pay no 'eed to it."

Eunice Johnston herself begged his forgiveness for her intrusion into his room when he thanked her for the flowers.

"Do not grudge me a simple little pleasure," she said. "I always used to put flowers in my father's study when I lived at home. You have no idea how I miss those little details of home-life."

Although she had cut herself adrift from the old domestic life, she was always thinking of her family, and Kelmarsh became quite familiar with the names and characteristics of her brothers and sisters. Clive, the youngest, was her favourite, and he was the only one who wrote to her, telling

her news of the others, and writing much of his own ambitions and disappointments. He was a clerk in Coutts's Bank, but had literary leanings, and loathed the clerical drudgery of his daily life. But he did not dare to break his chains and launch upon the sea of adventure. He had once broached the subject to his father, and there had been a domestic scene. Occasionally he met his sister in town, and they had tea together in an A.B.C. shop. Those were days of joy to Eunice Johnston; and Kelmarsh, to whom she gave accounts of her brother's conversation, could see that her independence was paid for by a bruised heart and by constant yearnings for the renewal of her family relations. He sometimes wondered whether it was right for the girl to live alone, brooding and becoming rather bitter in spirit, and finding an almost morbid excitement in the political struggles of her sex.

He was not unconscious of the girl's growing affection towards himself. There was sometimes a look in her eyes that rather startled him, a wistful, eager look of desire. She hung upon his words when sometimes in his own room or hers he spoke to her of his own ideals and ambitions, and told her something of his early life. Unlike Susy Sullivan, who flouted his most serious words and ridiculed his principles, Eunice Johnston listened to him with an air of reverence, or with eyes glowing with undisguised admiration which he found pleasant and soothing to his soul. And once or twice, sitting on a low stool by the little gas-fire in his room with her chin resting on her hand, she poured out her soul to him almost without reserve. She told him of her daily life as a typist in a city office, with a brute of a manager who bullied and insulted her, of the little jealousies and spites of her fellow-clerks, and of the monotonous and uncongenial work which was gradually warping her intelligence and stifling all natural emotions. She regretted that she had been brought up as a "lady," in surroundings of elegance and comfort which unfitted her for the austerity and ugliness of a city office. Her temperament was too sensitive to her surroundings, and even her education helped to make a torture of her daily toil, which was merely mechanical.

"I loved music once," she said; "and I was a great reader. Now music makes me so melancholy that I never play, and when I get home from the office I am so utterly tired out in mind and body that I cannot even read. Sometimes I force myself to read, and take up dear old John Stuart Mill, or Emerson's 'Essays.' But I find that I read with my eyes rather than with my brain, and I get no more good from it than if the pages were all blank sheets."

In the frankest way she often said how thankful she was that Kelmarsh had come to the boarding-house. Their friendship had brought a great joy into her life. She always felt cheered by his conversation, for there was no one else with whom she could talk intelligently except some women-friends in the League. Kelmarsh was not unmoved by this affection. It seemed to him the one thing that had been lacking in his previous experience of life. He liked to feel this refined and cultured girl found something to admire and to reverence in his character. It pleased him to think that a self-educated man like himself could call upon the sympathy and sensibilities of a girl whose culture had come to her as a birthright.

Perhaps it was because they had so much in common that their friendship was so undisturbed by other impulses. Kelmarsh, who, as an introspective man, studied his own temperament, realized that his affection, his warm affection, for Eunice Johnston was quite passionless. Never once did he thrill at her touch, when once or twice she put her hand on his, never were his senses even slightly stirred, when, as sometimes happened, she sat in his room, late in the evening, when the candles burned dim, and cast flickering shadows on the wall. He was glad of that. He believed in platonic friendships between men and women. He believed also in his own strength of character.

Once or twice, it is true, he had been a little startled by the look in her eyes, by the sudden whiteness which came into her face when he said, with reference to some subject of conversation, that he supposed he would marry one day, not believing that a man's nature was fully developed if he lived a celibate life. But he was reassured as

regards the safety of this companionship by her almost angry protests against the old idea that a woman's only career was marriage, and by her passionate defence of the platonic ideal. It seemed to him a pity indeed that she did not see eye to eye with him upon marriage. He agreed that it would not be the only career, but he was old-fashioned enough to think that it was her highest sphere if husband and wife were bound by a spiritual love founded upon mutual reverence. He thought Eunice Johnston a little hard and prejudiced, owing to her own unhappy home-life and her father's aggressive selfishness and tyranny.

It was almost their only difference of opinion, and Eunice Johnston answered his dogmatism on the subject by a touch of satire.

"All men talk to women in the superior attitude of a schoolmaster," she said. "Even you would like to punish me when I disagree with you." Then she added, melting into a kind of tenderness towards him: "And women have been so long subject to men that even I, who have paid something for independence and make a god of liberty, do not mind your lecturing. Lecture me, O my master, for I am your pupil, and will hear your lessons meekly."

"God preserve me from ever dogmatizing," said Kelmarsh, rather heatedly. Yet in this he showed some ignorance of himself. For dogmatism was his habit of mind.

He was rather surprised one day when little Miss Ringwood drew him aside and talked to him of Miss Johnston.

"She is a dear girl," said the old lady with enthusiasm. "But she is a victim of her own theories. All this women's suffrage movement is wicked nonsense, and is breaking more hearts than the faithlessness of men, which is saying something."

"That is what Mr. Vinnicombe remarks," said Kelmarsh, rather slyly, knowing her hostility to the retired Civil Servant.

"Then for once I agree with the old fool," said Miss Ringwood, tartly. She laid her hand on his arm. "There

is only one thing I want for dear Miss Johnston," she said.

"What is that?" said Kelmarsh.

"A good husband and plenty of nice healthy babies," said the old lady.

"Those are the very things for which she has no desire," said Kelmarsh, laughing. "She is devoted to a single life and liberty."

Miss Ringwood looked at him curiously. "Oh, you men," she said, "how little you know of our poor hearts! How little you see of things under your very noses!"

"I happen to know something of Miss Johnston's ideas," said Kelmarsh. "She has been good enough to give me her friendship."

"Pooh!" said Miss Ringwood, scornfully. "As if there could be friendship between a young girl and a young man. It isn't in human nature, my dear. One at least of the couple wants something else."

"Oh, I see," said Kelmarsh. "You belong to the school of Mother Grundy. . . . I am surprised at you, Miss Ringwood," he said, tapping the old lady's hand.

"A very wise old woman is Mother Grundy," said Miss Ringwood. "She knows a thing or two, and has had a lot of experience."

"She is a dastardly old creature," said Kelmarsh, "always sniffing out scandal and poking her nose in where she is not wanted."

"Leave her out of the question, please," said Miss Ringwood, evading the subject. "I am talking about a very nice girl named Eunice Johnston."

"Don't you think it is rather a mistake to do so?" said Kelmarsh, a little impatiently.

"Hoity-toity!" said Miss Ringwood. "Is that the way you talk to an old woman who might be your grandmother? Bless my soul! what's the world coming to?"

"I hope it has progressed since the Mid-Victorian school of morals," said Kelmarsh.

"Fiddlesticks!" cried the old lady, angrily. "Try to be a little less conceited, young man."

"Don't let us quarrel," said Kelmarsh, colouring up.

"It takes two to make a quarrel," said Miss Ringwood. "I am going to play the part of the fairy godmother and whisper a little secret into your ear."

She put both hands to his head and pulled it down gently. Then she whispered a few words to him.

Kelmarsh started back and got very red in the face. "Please don't say such absurd things," he said. "I'm ashamed of you."

"My dear boy," said the old lady, amiably, "you can get as cross as two sticks. It doesn't alter the truth. I have got eyes in my old noddle, remarkably bright eyes, I can assure you."

"I trust you won't repeat what you said to anyone else," said Kelmarsh, seriously.

"You can 'trust' what you please," said Miss Ringwood, ruffling up again. "I am not to be lectured on discretion and good behaviour by a chit of a boy. Don't say 'trust' to me; I don't like the word."

Kelmarsh said "I'm sorry," and walked out of the room. He walked a good deal during the next half-hour, for he paced up and down his own room, stopping now and again to say "Preposterous!" and "Absolutely ridiculous!"

He was thinking of Miss Ringwood's whispered words: "Eunice Johnston is desperately in love with you. Be good and make her a happy wife."

He went back over the incidents of their friendship; he recalled their many conversations. There had been nothing in their friendly intercourse which even remotely suggested that the old woman downstairs was speaking the truth, nothing except—except the curious light that sometimes shone in Eunice Johnston's eyes. He put the idea from him. Yes, it was ridiculous. More than that, it was wicked. How dare that old lady try to create mischief by such suggestions! That was the worst of living in a boarding-house. It was inevitably a home of tittle-tattle.

That evening he went to speak at a woman's suffrage meeting at Brixton. Ever since his speech at the Caxton Hall he had been deluged with invitations, and he had

accepted several of these, deciding that, in spite of his odious nickname, "Kiss-me-Kelmarsh," which was constantly appearing in the Conservative section of the Press, he would not abandon a noble cause because of ridicule. Eunice Johnston was at the meeting, and he saw her applauding him in one of the front seats when he sat down after a speech more successful in its logical chain of argument than the rather oratorical effort which had first brought him into prominence as the advocate of women's political freedom. They went home together on the electric car to Westminster Bridge, and, in spite of all his efforts, he felt a little embarrassed when he thought of Miss Ringwood's extraordinary assertion. But Eunice chatted in her usual quiet way, and his discomfiture left him. He determined that he would not be weak enough to let an old woman's mischief spoil a very delightful intimacy.

XIX

BEFORE many weeks of his first session had passed, Kelmarsh had settled down into the collar of a Parliamentary life. As with all young members, the high hopes with which he had entered were speedily overthrown. He no longer dreamt of great oratorical efforts—he had only raised his voice in the House to ask questions or to interject a remark—and he quickly realized that a brilliant career was not the work of a few weeks. The House of Commons was a home of prerogative, and ruled almost as much as the outside world by the influence of birth and social position. There were certain exceptions, some few, even without any influence but ability or indefinable qualities of character (which did not always mean knowledge and gifts of intellect), having pushed themselves through the crowd to front places. But the younger son of a peer, or the man who could subscribe

largely to party funds, or the heir to a great Parliamentary name, gained easy chance of distinction when it was denied to others like himself. His fellow-members were not only divided into political groups, but still more into social coteries, into which it seemed impossible for a poor and self-educated and friendless man to enter, and he quickly discovered that a Parliamentary career depends not so much upon legislative sense, sound knowledge, and debating powers, as upon diplomacy, tact, and personality. The smoking-room of the House was the place where men made their reputations, and worked their way to advancement. A "good fellow" became popular with his fellow-members. A silent, reserved man was left in loneliness. Exasperated at first by these distinctions, and self-confident in his abilities, Kelmarsh was inclined to be impatient of the whole system. But it was gradually borne home upon him that after all the House of Commons was a wonderful machine for the sifting of character and ideas. He had come there with fixed principles and with a definite political creed. He found that among these men principles were always subject to argument and compromise, and that political creeds were thrown into a melting-pot. Opinions that had seemed to him as true as the laws of Nature were challenged and denied. Facts were always overthrowing theories; theories were continually being remodelled or destroyed. He denounced those, who, protesting openly against the folly of a certain Bill, voted in its favour, and against the tyranny of party law, which made a man support a measure in which he had no interest or knowledge, in order to gain the support of his party for his own special crank. He protested that policy was of far more importance than honesty, and that violence of speech inevitably preceded weak compromise. He learnt, indeed, to loathe that word "compromise," which seemed to corrupt the spirit of the strongest Government of modern times: as it was constantly on the lips of individual members on both sides of the House.

Even Dunstan, his Labour leader, who in his private character and speech was the most dominant man Kel-

marsh had met, was ready to strike a bargain, and concede the most vital points of principle in order to gain some small concession from his political opponents. When Kelmarsh protested, he laughed good-naturedly, and said that he took the world as he found it, and did not run his head heedlessly against brick walls.

"My policy," he said, "is, 'take a hinch where you can't get a hell.' You're lucky if you get the hinch."

Socially, Kelmarsh felt himself isolated in the House. His reserved nature did not make friends easily, and in a general conversation he was a one-sentence man. To his misfortune, he found himself temperamentally in a curious and uncomfortable position. His solitary student days, when he had been a hard reader, had given him a literary education above the level of the Labour members with whom he was most closely associated. With few exceptions, they were ignorant men according to the literary man's idea of knowledge. They had a practical experience of life, but they had not gone further in scholarship than the textbooks of elementary history and elementary economy and a polytechnic course of study. Intellectually, therefore, they were in many ways his inferiors, and he had a certain arrogance of intellect which did not allow him to stoop without an effort. In other ways he felt himself ill at ease with them. Their vulgarity of speech and roughness of manner shocked his sensibilities, though he honestly condemned himself for such treachery to his democratic principles. But his parents had bequeathed to him a certain refinement of speech above their own class in Burslem. From his mother especially, who, in the opinion of her relations, had "married beneath her," he had, besides, a sensitive ear to which the dropping of an "h," the slovenly drawl of the Midland dialect, or the Cockney twang, was an offence. Among the members of his own party, therefore, he was rather an alien, and only with Dunstan, whose rugged force of character was superior to all defects of education, did he become intimate in friendship. On the other hand, with all the prejudice of a young democrat, and of a self-made man against "caste" and "class," he held himself proudly aloof from

the "snobs," as he called them. Conscious of his intellectual superiority to the Labour men, he was painfully conscious also of his social inferiority to those others. He envied their easy manners and that indefinable air which gave them their uncontested claim to social rank. He felt that by the side of them he was something of a boor and something of a prig. He knew that they looked upon him, though they never revealed their judgment by a single spoken word, or by the slightest act of discourtesy, as an "outsider."

Curiously enough, in spite of his sensitive pride, or his rather morbid and bitter prejudice against these castes and coteries in the House, it was with one of the "snobs" that he established a close and interesting friendship.

The man was Basil Chilvers, the son of the famous barrister and the nephew and heir of an obscure Catholic peer who had the title of Lord Cossington. Chilvers was Conservative member for Taunton, and his only distinction in the political world seemed, according to the newspapers, to be his reputation as the best-dressed man in London. Kelmarsh had been struck not so much by his dress, which was always perfectly correct, but not at all eccentric, as by his extremely handsome face and charm of manner. It was rather a noble face, with clear-cut features, a sensitive, amiable mouth, and greyish-blue eyes in which there was always an expression of quiet humour and good fellowship.

Kelmarsh first came in personal touch with him in the House of Commons smoking-room. Dunstan had taken Kelmarsh into a corner to discuss some details of the problem of pauper relief over a cup of coffee, and they happened to sit close to a lounge chair in which Chilvers was stretched at full length, with his arms behind his head, and his eyes shut as though asleep. It was then that Kelmarsh was impressed by the real beauty of his face, especially in still and placid pose.

Dunstan became rather violent in some of his remarks, and he denounced the utter selfishness of the wealthy classes, who were unmoved by all the horrors of life among

the very poor. They didn't care a curse for the wastage and torture of human lives.

With these words Chilvers opened his eyes, and moving a little, sat up, looking at Dunstan and Kelmarsh with a singularly pleasant smile.

"Forgive me," he said, "but why do you Labour gentlemen talk sky-bosh to each other inside the House?"

Dunstan gave a good-natured guffaw. "So we woke you up," he said. "A good many of you want waking up."

"I have been very much amused," said Chilvers. "That sort of talk is good enough to stir the passions of the mob, but you must know there is little truth in it. Cod your constituents, my dear fellows, by all means, but don't cod yourselves."

He laughed pleasantly, and took a cigarette out of a little case, offering one to Kelmarsh.

"Look here, Chilvers," said Dunstan, familiarly. "What you don't know about tailoring ain't knowledge, but don't discuss social economy, because that is outside your mark."

"Oh, I know I am an ass," said Chilvers, "but I have a certain old-fashioned respect for fair play. You say the wealthy classes don't care a curse for the poor. As a matter of fact, they subscribe so heavily nowadays to every kind of charity that half of them will soon want pauper relief themselves."

Charity was the one word which Kelmarsh most hated, and, as usual, he could not leave it alone.

"Charity!" he said bitterly. "If there is such a thing as hell, many souls will get there owing to that humbug and hypocrisy. It is the soft pillow for uneasy consciences."

Chilvers looked at Kelmarsh with the corners of his lips twitching.

"I envy men like you," he said. "You have such passionate convictions. I have none at all, for I always see both sides of a question. That is why I'm such a fool in politics." He lit the cigarette which he had been playing with. "I have a good mind to write to an old uncle of mine and tell him the latest theory on charity, from

your point of view, as the representatives of the people. He is simply robbing me of an already impoverished inheritance. If he hadn't my restraining influence, he would sell all he has to give to the poor. I have often argued with him on the subject, but never with such force as you spoke just now. But then, you see, he is a Christian and believes in the hell of which you seem to doubt, and is terribly old-fashioned."

Kelmarsh was prepared to teach him something about the laws of social economy, but Chilvers got up, and, stretching himself with a lazy grace which revealed an athletic form, begged Kelmarsh to excuse him.

"I must get round to the club," he said. "I haven't opened my morning's letters, and it is now four o'clock. Anyhow, I shall know what to do with begging letters. They used to bother me frightfully."

He strolled off, and Dunstan, when he was out of ear-shot, summed him up as a typical Englishman of good family.

"The fellow is a Catholic because his fathers were before him, and what was good enough for them is good enough for him. He is a Conservative for the same reason. He does everything in life because people of his class have always done it before. He is a thorough good fellow, poor for his position in society, generous according to his means, thoroughly lazy on principle. Rather bored with himself and others, a dear delightful ass in every way. He is typical of the ruling classes of this misgoverned country."

"The sooner we sweep them on one side the better," said Kelmarsh.

"Ah, you believe in clean sweeps!" said Dunstan. "So do I in theory; but it goes against the grain of the English people. They don't mind flicking a duster over dirty places, but they draw the line at a clean sweep."

Chilvers used to nod to Kelmarsh after this conversation, and the day after his speech at the Caxton Hall came over to him in the lobby.

"So you are a champion of women's suffrage?" he said, with a quizzical smile.

"Not at all," said Kelmarsh, stiffly. "But I shall give my support to the movement."

"I admire your disinterestedness, my dear fellow," said Chilvers. He sat down on one of the benches running along the side of the wall, and, stretching out his legs, looked with some affection at a pair of patent boots with cloth uppers. "To me it is like the self-sacrifice of a man who commits suicide, out of sheer benevolence towards his fellow-creatures."

"I don't see the parallel," said Kelmarsh.

"Don't you?" said Chilvers. "That is because I am a poor hand at expressing what I am pleased to call my ideas. Never mind. I won't worry you."

"You dislike the influence of women, then?" said Kelmarsh, unwilling for some reason to close the conversation.

"I?" said Chilvers, smiling. "Heaven forbid! Women are a part of my religion. I worship them—some of them."

"Then how can you oppose their legitimate aspirations?" said Kelmarsh.

"My dear fellow, don't use such long words. If you mean I object to women without sex, I do, most strongly."

"What has that got to do with it?" said Kelmarsh.

"Everything," said Chilvers. "The whole meaning of this new movement among women is the denial of their sex. They want to do men's work instead of women's work. They don't want to be mothers any more. Good heavens, if women had been emancipated a generation ago, I shouldn't have been born! Fancy that. I should never have been able to wear these delightful boots, which are quite the best that ever came out of Bond Street."

Kelmarsh laughed rather bitterly. "Men of your class always avoid a serious subject by flippancy——"

"I assure you I am in deadly earnest," said Chilvers, shutting one eye and regarding his shining toe-caps with the other.

"Well, whatever your point of view," said Kelmarsh, "it doesn't alter facts. Women will get all they demand."

"Oh, I agree with you!" said Chilvers. "But not in our time, thank goodness. It is very uncomfortable even now, with all these unsexed women howling like wolves for one's blood. I am sure I hate going out to dinner for that reason. I always expect to be served up as an *entrée*. But my bones will be whitening on the shores of Time when they have annihilated men by killing off all male babies, or by refusing to bear children at all."

"That is nonsensical talk!" said Kelmarsh, impatiently.

Chilvers laughed quietly, and looked at him with a kind of ironical admiration.

"How straightforward you are, Kelmarsh!" he said. "I like you for that, although I can see we disagree on everything in life. I wish you would come to dinner with me one evening at my rooms. I am sure I should enjoy a long chat with you."

Kelmarsh thought he was satirical, and went off with a smouldering sense of wounded pride, underneath which, however, there was a feeling of attraction toward the handsome fellow with his easy ways and imperturbable amiability.

XX

THE young Labour member was surprised a week later to get a written invitation to dinner from Chilvers, addressed from Pont Street. "Do favour me," it said. "It would give me real pleasure." There was a postscript which caused Kelmarsh to smile with just a touch of secret annoyance. "Do not trouble to dress."

"I suppose the fellow means evening dress," he said. "Thank Heaven, I am not so far advanced in snobbishness. As if a white shirt-front were a kind of mystic symbol of social sanctification!"

He was tempted to throw the letter into the fire, and

write a curt refusal. Chilvers had merely asked him to dinner in order to study the psychology of an inferior creature. Then the man's delightful smile haunted him, and he wrote accepting. After all it would be a new experience.

When he went to Pont Street he wore his usual blue serge suit and dump hat. It seemed to him that the eyes of the quiet footman who let him into the flat rested on his clothes with a little surprise and amusement. It may have been Kelmarsh's fancy, but he wished for a moment that he had not put himself into the position of being stared at by a flunkey and patronized by a snob.

A moment later he forgot himself in the interest of studying a room more elegant than anything he had yet seen. He supposed it was a kind of dining- and drawing-room combined, for, at one end, the table was set out for a *tête-à-tête* dinner, and the light from four tall candles in old-fashioned silver candlesticks made a pool of light on a polished oak table, and gleamed bright upon Venetian wine-glasses. Near to where he stood stiffly with his hands behind his back, was a rosewood grand piano, upon which was a piece of Greek sculpture, the head of a girl-child, as pure as a white flower. Kelmarsh's eyes roved about the room and rested upon a Venus without her arms, some exquisite little statues in alabaster, a small table crowded with snuff-boxes and miniatures, a carved oak sideboard laden with blue china, two complete suits of sixteenth-century armour in the recess on each side of the chimney-place, and upon trophies of old weapons and firearms round the walls. Along one wall ran a long row of low bookcases, and Kelmarsh glanced over the titles of the books, some of which were handsomely bound, though others were old and tattered. They attracted him with an irresistible fascination, and he saw that they were in French, English, and Italian, and numbered many volumes of poetry, fiction, and memoirs. Then his interest was stirred by the pictures above them, and by others propped up against books on the window-sills. Most of them were portraits of men and women in costumes of various periods, and he seemed to see in some of them a

faint resemblance to Chilvers himself, some look in the eyes, and in the lines of the mouth, that was common to all of them. But there were also some clever water-colour sketches of foreign places, and on an easel by itself, in one corner of the room, was a bold study of a girl in white with a large black hat. It was a face of singular charm, with curious and wistful eyes, and a mouth of exquisite tenderness and sensibility. Kelmarsh, who was a student of faces, was strangely moved by this portrait, and his admiration as an artist for the clever technique of the work was overpowered by the haunting interest of the face itself.

He was bending over it when the door opened and Chilvers came in.

"I am so glad you have come," he said quietly. "Forgive me for keeping you waiting. I was wrestling with a collar-stud, and spoilt three collars over it—one of those collapsible things invented by the devil."

He was in a grey flannel suit, with a bright tie, and looked delightfully easy and clean. Kelmarsh was struck indeed by his cleanliness. He looked as if he had just come out of a bath, and even his nails had the appearance of being freshly manicured. Kelmarsh thought swiftly of a passage by Tolstoy, denouncing the excessive cleanliness of the leisured classes, and it seemed to him that the old "Mujik's" philosophy was right. A man ought not to be so obtrusively clean. It was a sign of laziness and luxury.

"I have been looking at your pictures," he said. "Those portraits have a family likeness to you."

"Do you see it!" said Chilvers. "Other people notice it, though I'm dashed if I do. They were dreadful scoundrels, some of those fellows."

"And yet, I suppose, you're proud of them?" said Kelmarsh, trying, but unsuccessfully, to restrain a touch of sarcasm.

"Oh, they had their good qualities," said Chilvers, "even the worst of them. I am proud to say they were good fighting men. I suppose you would call them butchers. Isn't that your point of view? . . . Anyhow, they played the game rather gallantly. I am a degenerate son of a good old stock."

He spoke lightly, but it seemed to Kelmarsh that there was sincerity in his voice when he spoke of his degeneracy. But Kelmarsh admitted to himself that this handsome fellow would also "play the game" gallantly, no doubt. But Life would always be "the game" to him. He would never take it seriously.

"That face interests me most," said Kelmarsh. He walked over to the portrait of the girl in white, and looked at it again with his hands in his pockets.

Chilvers was a moment before he answered. "It's my cousin," he said. "I'm glad you like it. It was a happy fluke of mine."

"Did you paint it?" said Kelmarsh, astonished.

"Yes," said Chilvers, "I dabble." He pointed out some of the sketches in water-colour. "I amused myself with those. Pretty weak, I admit. Still, I don't pretend to be anything but a *dilettante*."

"They're clever," said Kelmarsh, looking at them critically. "Some of the drawing is faulty, but the colour is good."

"I see you are a critic," said Chilvers. "Perhaps you paint too?"

"Well," said Kelmarsh, "by profession I am a designer; I suppose I ought to know something about form and colour."

He flushed a little. The words sounded conceited, though he had not intended to be egotistical.

Chilvers was interested, and drew him out about his views on art. Then as they sat at table he talked of Italian and French art, revealing a rather wide knowledge and a fine sense of beauty. Kelmarsh had to confess his own ignorance of the great masterpieces, but Chilvers put him at ease with his self-conceit by appealing to him on certain principles of art.

"I simply go by what I like," he said. "Of course you understand technique, and the laws that govern the standard of criticism."

"Oh," said Kelmarsh, hurriedly, "I am a craftsman, not an artist."

"Ah," said Chilvers. "I like to hear you say that."

The old masters called themselves craftsmen. I hate the word 'artist' myself. It goes with a velvet coat in St. John's Wood."

It was a characteristic of Chilvers that he did not pursue one subject for any length. He seemed to have a butterfly mind, and touched lightly upon many topics. He seemed to find a quiet amusement in appealing to his man Jenkins, who waited at table, to the annoyance of Kelmarsh, who found his attendance extremely disconcerting.

"Do you approve of this tie, Jenkins?" he said, after a brief excursion into the modern French drama.

"It's somewhat light for your complexion, sir," said Jenkins, gravely, after a swift scrutiny.

"Do you think so, Jenkins?" said Chilvers. "Then I must sacrifice it upon the altar of good taste." He turned to Kelmarsh and spoke of his man as though he had left the room. "Wonderful man, Jenkins," he said. "I have unbounded confidence in his judgment. He is responsible for all my little triumphs, and my failures are due entirely to an occasional revolt against his good advice. What is your opinion of the Liberal Government, Jenkins?" he said, with the air of a man wishing to show off the talents of a prodigy.

Jenkins paused in the act of pouring out a glass of wine for his master.

"Inspired by idealism founded upon ignorance," he said, and filled the glass to the brim without spilling a drop.

Chilvers looked across at Kelmarsh with an expression which seemed to say, "How's that for a brilliant epigram?"

"But surely, Jenkins," he said, "you will allow them some credit for progressive legislation?"

"No, sir," said Jenkins, decidedly. "What legislation they've affected is entirely fanatical. Believe me, sir, the spirit of plunder and hypocrisy is not in accordance with English traditions."

"There I venture to disagree with you, Jenkins," said Chilvers, "but at the present moment I would prefer a cigarette to an argument. Remarkable fellow," he said to Kelmarsh, when Jenkins had retired for a moment. "He

has cut-and-dried opinions upon every subject in life. I always consult him before going to the House. He keeps me in the straight path of Tory traditions."

When the man came back with the cigarettes, Chilvers said—

"By the way, Jenkins, I forget how you stand about women's suffrage? Do you support the movement?"

Jenkins lit a match and applied it to Kelmarsh's cigarette.

"I regret, sir, that my knowledge of women has left me with a very low idea of their intelligence," said Jenkins, imperturbably.

"Indeed?" said Chilvers. "I am sorry to hear that. I'm afraid you are unjust, Jenkins."

"I hope not," said Jenkins, with an air of a man to whom injustice is an impossibility. "Women, as at present constituted, have no moral sense."

"You alarm me, Jenkins," said his master.

"Yes, sir," said Jenkins. "It's a very painful fact. Totally as I disagree with Bernard Shaw in many respects, I will say that he knows women backwards. I refer to 'Man and Superman.'"

"Well, leave us now, Jenkins," said his master; "any more of this pessimism will spoil our coffee."

Jenkins retired with dignity, and Kelmarsh breathed a sigh of relief as he closed the door behind him silently.

"It baffles me how you can live with such a man," he said, almost angrily.

"My dear fellow, I couldn't live without him," said Chilvers. "He is quite invaluable. He not only looks after my person, but he forms all my opinions. It saves me a lot of worry."

"If you are a representative of your class," said Kelmarsh, "the nation must be governed by flunkeydom. It explains a lot that seemed mysterious to me."

"Ah," said Chilvers, laughing quietly with real enjoyment, "you have discovered the secret of the Constitution."

"Do you get your religion from Jenkins, too?" said Kelmarsh, sarcastically.

"No," said Chilvers, "I had that from my fathers."

For the first time it seemed to Kelmarsh that his host resented this frankness of speech from his guest. But after a swift glance at Kelmarsh with a sudden tightening of his lips he smiled again and said lightly—

“I am bound to confess, however, that Jenkins keeps me to my religious duties. He will never allow me to forget abstinence day. You see, he belongs to the Third Order of St. Francis, and is very strict.”

Kelmarsh muttered something about “Mediaevalism,” and Chilvers at once took up the challenge, and launched into a delightfully amusing defence of the mediæval spirit against the spirit of modernity. But beneath his glinting humour there was a note of sincerity, and presently he put his hand on Kelmarsh’s knee with a friendly pressure.

“My dear fellow,” he said, “you think by being a free-thinker and a Democrat that you are going to reform the world. You, and the rest of you, are certainly going to change the world, but not for the better. Believe me, not for the better. In the old days men led simple lives. Inspired by a simple faith they had far higher ideals of beauty, they had more beauty in their daily lives, they were better men in body and mind than the people of to-day with all their pride of intellect and pride of liberty. Progress of education, progress of democracy—what has it done for you? Look at the stunted men, the stunted souls in our great cities. Is that your answer? The serf and the freeman under the lord of the manor had a better time than the machine-winder in a Lancashire mill. He had the wind and the sun in his face, and the good brown earth at his feet, beans and bacon for his belly, and the spirit of God in his simple soul. You talk about the tyranny of the Church. You forget the poetry of the Church. There is no poetry in the modern life. It is a grey hard cruel thing for most of you. Believe me, Kelmarsh, my dear fellow, you make a mistake in worshipping the intellect at the expense of the spirit, and liberty above the simple moral code. Look at me with my pettifogging intellect, my tuppenny-halfpenny talents, my artistic impulses! What are they worth in happiness? Precious little—a morbid thrill or so, an over-excited sensibility, a

foolish, sensuous temperament. I am the product of my age—a type of the higher education and the civilized comforts which democracy is striving for. I should have been a happier man as a fifteenth-century squire who could not sign his name, who had no foreknowledge of Browning, who worshipped God and our Lady and fought for his King or his overlord with a sense of Divine guidance. With all his animalism, and with a brutality which I am firmly convinced is a necessary element of human nature, he was uplifted always by the spirituality of a simple creed."

Kelmarsh was excited almost to anger by these words, and he argued so heatedly against feudalism and priestcraft, and the tyranny of religious superstition, and the injustice and greed of the upper classes, that Chilvers, after watching him with an amused smile for several minutes, sprang up with a light-hearted laugh.

"You want to quarrel with me," he said. "Let me soothe your savage breast with a little music."

He sat down at the piano and played Mendelssohn's "Spring Song" with delicate grace, and then in a fine baritone voice broke into an old French chanson.

"How astonishing you are!" said Kelmarsh, forgetting his wrath and compelled to admiration. "You have all the talents at your command."

"I have a fatal versatility," said Chilvers. "I can do many things a little, and nothing well."

"You play magnificently," said Kelmarsh.

Chilvers laughed. "My old professor used to say I exasperated him to the point of madness. He was good enough to admire my touch, but said my technique was damnable. I never could play the simplest passage without three mistakes."

When Kelmarsh left, Chilvers shook hands with him in the friendliest way.

"I have enjoyed myself like a schoolboy," he said. "Once or twice you made me forget my flippancy, and talk as though I had a stock of principles and convictions."

"I believe you are not so unprincipled as you make out," said Kelmarsh, smiling.

"But for Jenkins," said Chilvers, "I should be a political weathercock and a moral agnostic. Jenkins is my only salvation. Well, good night. One of these days I will make a Tory of you, and a mystic."

Kelmarsh walked home excited by the memory of a conversation which had ranged, it seemed, from heaven to earth, and from modernity to prehistoric time. He fretted with annoyance at many of the things Chilvers had said in his irresponsible way, and taking him as a type of a great class of Englishmen was filled with indignation at the reactionary ideas and almost determined stupidity of these men who could live in the modern world with such little sympathy for the spirit of their age. He could not understand how a man like Chilvers, with such talents and with magnificent opportunities given to him by education, by easy circumstances, and by social position, could face life with such levity. It was a lesson in tolerance, and his own character was broadened a little by getting closer to the personality of Chilvers, who belonged to a class which he had despised and denounced.

XXI

KELMARSH astonished Susy Sullivan extremely by confessing that he had never been inside a theatre. If he had confessed that he had never been inside a railway train, and always travelled by airship, she could not have been more astonished.

"Goodness gracious!" she said. "You're as bad as Mr. Stead, who was bald-headed before he went to a pantomime."

Kelmarsh suggested that he would be glad to remedy this deplorable gap in his education by seeing a performance at the Frivolity Theatre where she was playing in "The Butterfly Girl." If possible, also he would like

to go behind the scenes so that he could see something of the inside of theatrical life.

Miss Sullivan was very doubtful whether this could be managed. "It is strictly against the rules," she said. However, she had a little influence with the ballet-master, who had a soft spot somewhere in his heart, though it was not easy to locate—and she would see what she could do.

Evidently she was successful in finding the soft spot in a hard heart, for on the following Saturday morning she popped her head into Kelmarsh's room, and said that if he sent in his card at the stage door at seven o'clock he would be taken behind.

"I won't guarantee that you'll survive the ordeal," said Susy. "It'll be a shock to your tender sensibilities; and if you have any corns, wear thick boots."

"We might have a little supper together after the play," said Kelmarsh.

"My word!" said Susy, satirically, "you *are* going the pace!" Her eyes, however, lighted up, and she admitted that he was a dear boy to think of such a thing. "We'll go to the Bohemian in Soho; their midnight suppers are scrummy, I can tell you."

"Well, how shall I get hold of you?" said Kelmarsh.

"Oh, don't you be nervous. I'll get hold of *you*. I won't let that supper slip through my fingers."

At seven o'clock Kelmarsh duly presented himself at the stage door and sent in his card to Mr. Simonetti, the ballet-master. The door-keeper, a commissionaire with five medals on his chest, who sat in a small box reading a pink paper, told him in a surly voice to wait, and "He'd trouble him to shut that blasted door."

Kelmarsh obeyed, but a moment afterwards the "blasted" door opened again, and admitted a lady in furs and a large picture hat.

"Evening, Charlie," she said to the commissionaire. "Any letters?"

The commissionaire went slowly through a dozen letters from a pigeon-hole, wetting his thumb and forefinger, and leaving an admirably defined finger-print on each envelope.

Then he shoved them back and without a word went on reading his paper.

"None!" said the lady. "Damn!"

"Shut the door, can't yer!" said the commissioner, as two other young ladies in furs and large picture hats came through.

"Oh, you amiable old thing!" said one of the young ladies. "Will you be so very sweet as to see if there is a tiny weeny letter for me?"

"Oh, my Gawd!" said the commissioner, pulling out another budget and adding another set of finger-prints to the envelopes.

"Don't hurry, will you?" said the lady, sweetly. "The house doesn't mind waiting."

The commissioner shuffled all the letters together and looked up with a smouldering anger in his heavy eyes.

"Look 'ere," he said, "do yer want your bloomin' letters or don't yer?"

"My dear old Charlie," said the lady, "I do, I do, I do."

"Well, then," said the commissioner, "you'll have to be 'ave yerself."

A man with scarlet hair and green eyes poked his extraordinary head through a swing-door opposite.

"Are you Mr. Kelmarsh?" he said, staring at the visitor.

"Yes," said Kelmarsh.

"Well, come this way, and mind yer 'ead."

He led Kelmarsh down a dark passage, through a heavy iron door which closed behind them with a clang, down three stairs, and along another dark passage, and then between huge pieces of ragged scenery to the back of the stage. It was extraordinarily dark, it seemed to Kelmarsh, coming in from the light of day, and he blinked into the gloominess without seeing anything for a few moments. A dark shadow moved towards him, and a man's voice speaking in strong foreign accents, asked the question again, "Are you Mr. Kelmarsh?"

"Yes," said Kelmarsh.

He was now able to see a tall dark man with a sallow skin and burning eyes.

"Enchanted to meet a friend of my leetle Miss Susy. Par ici, s'il vous plaît."

He took him by his arm and led him across the stage through a forest of paste-board trees, and pushed him almost roughly into a narrow space close to the great curtain in front of the footlights.

"Restez ici," he said. "Stand 'ere. Dere is not much place, but you vill see."

He held out his hand to Kelmarsh. "You vill excuse me?"

"Certainly," said Kelmarsh.

The member for Burslem was left by the side of a man on a kitchen chair, who was manipulating a curious instrument with a number of little taps and buttons. The stage was still in half-darkness, but Kelmarsh could now see through the gloom a group of men in plain clothes who were staring up into the black vault above, where there were little twinkling lights and dark figures, who shouted across to each other in hoarse voices. At the back three sets of scenery were swaying to and fro as if a gale of wind were blowing, pushed into their places by a little gang of men with their coats off, perspiring and breathing heavily. One of them trundled a piece of scenery towards Kelmarsh.

"Git back, can't yer," he cried. "What the 'ell's the use of standing there?"

Kelmarsh squeezed close to the wall, and just escaped having his toes crushed.

From the other side of the curtain came the confused noise of a great audience, the sound of coughing and sneezing, the murmur of many voices. Then an electric bell rang, there was the sound of a little stick tapping against an iron bar, and the orchestra struck into a march tune. Then suddenly from each side of the stage there came a strange swishing noise like rushing water. It was the sound of women's silk and satin skirts, and draperies covered with silver spangles, swirling down stone stairways behind the scenes, with the click-clack of many high heels, and the pattering of many feet. The wings were crowded with

women, and Kelmarsh, as he leant against the stone wall, was brushed by their skirts. They were all gossiping and laughing and humming, and tattooing on bare boards with heel and toe, almost noisily.

Kelmarsh caught stray snatches of conversation.

"How are you feeling to-night, dear? . . . Oh, only so, so, darling . . . my, what a draught! . . . Oh dear, I've got the hump very bad this evening . . . and she said to me, 'I won't stand it,' she said, 'not for any money!' . . . Your nose looks quite red, sweet one. Is it indigestion?"

Kelmarsh was abashed by these young women so close to him that now and then their fluffy hair touched his face and their bare arms pressed against him, as they squeezed their way past. They were dressed as fancy shepherdesses, in bodices cut extraordinarily low and very short skirts, with white fluffy petticoats and long pink stockings. Powder and paint were thick on their faces, and the atmosphere about Kelmarsh was laden with a peculiar and rather sickening scent. He looked out for Susy, but he could not see her face among these women, some of whom were pretty in a doll-like way, but some horribly fat and coarse, when seen so closely.

His Quaker blood and early training made him feel curiously shocked at the thought of seeing Susy Sullivan in her shepherdess dress, with her short skirt and bare neck and arms. What an awful life! he thought. What degradation of womanhood! And as the thoughts came to him there was a light touch on his arm, and a merry voice at his ear, said—

"Hullo! so you've found your way here?"

He turned round and saw Susy smiling at him roguishly. He kept his eyes on her face, avoiding her scanty costume.

"It's all very queer!" he said.

"I thought you'd be surprised. It's as natural as grease-paint to me."

The man on the kitchen chair called out angrily, "Get back there, you girls. How the devil can the principals get through?"

"So long," said Susy. "See you later."

The women pressed back and formed a lane, through which came three girls dressed as butterflies, with gauzy dresses and glittering wings. Kelmarsh recognized them as the ladies in furs with the picture hats who had been speaking to the commissionaire. They were followed by three young men in white satin suits with white perukes.

One of them looked at the man on the kitchen chair. "I'll trouble you for ten bob, old man, when I come off. It was a rank outsider."

"Just my rotten luck," said the man on the kitchen chair.

He played on the case with innumerable buttons, and it seemed to Kelmarsh that he was signalling to various parts of the theatre. Behind him was a great switchboard, where a man in blue overalls stood at a wheel manipulating the lighting apparatus of the stage. Then he stamped on his chair with a sharp cry of "Stand-by!" There was a sudden silence, and in another moment he called "lights out." The stage was pitch black, and Kelmarsh could hear the breathing of the crowd of women behind him, seeing nothing in the darkness. There was a click, and the curtain went up and the man on the chair played on his signals. The three shepherdesses were in front of the footlights, singing a trio and waving their crooks. The butterfly girls danced round them, and the men in white satin suits kissed their hands to them. Suddenly there was a stampede of women past Kelmarsh, who was pressed back against the wall, and the whole crowd of them tripped on to the stage in a mazy dance. He followed Susy with his eyes. She was one of the chorus, and as she passed in front of the footlights, her short skirt and fluffy petticoats swirling above her long pink stockings, her little feet twinkling over the stage, he saw her eyes dancing and her white teeth flashing in the brilliant light. She was certainly the prettiest girl in the crowd, but to Kelmarsh this exhibition of her beauty seemed a shameless thing. He was filled with a kind of indignant pity that an innocent girl should so degrade herself in the public eye.

Suddenly the man on the chair played on his signal, and the stage was again in darkness. Kelmarsh found

himself in the midst of a wild scene. Regardless of the life and limbs of the actors and actresses, an army of scene-shifters invaded the stage and hurled off the forest of great pasteboard trees, sent up the skies, and trundled on canvases fifty feet high, while the crowd of women dodged these pieces of scenery in the darkness with outstretched hands, got wedged in between them, pushed and struggled with each other, trod on each other's toes, knocked their heads against cardboard pillars, and in a fierce scrimmage with little squeals, and subdued cries, and low laughter, came into the wings.

"Oh dear, oh lor'!" said one of the ladies. "I was nearly stunned by one of those brutes."

"Oh, gracious," said another lady, kissing her elbow, "what a frightful bruise!"

"Powff!" said one of the shepherdesses, "I've lost whole bits of skin."

Susy clutched Kelmarsh's arm, laughing excitedly.

"Ten minutes to change!" she said. "You'll like me in my next frock. It's perfectly sweet."

"Can't I get out of this?" said Kelmarsh. "I've had enough."

"What!" cried Susy. "Are you going to go back on that little supper?"

"No," said Kelmarsh. "I'll meet you outside the theatre."

"Oh, I shan't let you escape!" cried Susy. "You must see it through."

"Not so much noise there!" shouted a voice.

"Now be a good boy, and don't disappoint me!" said Susy.

She swished away, holding up her skirts in front, and Kelmarsh stood alone again, wishing he had never come to such a place, and watching the man on the chair, who seemed to blow down six speaking-tubes with one mouth.

His first experience of the theatre had disgusted him by its vulgarity, its stupidity, and its squalor. He was eager to get out again into the fresh air, away from this smell of grease-paint and damp scenery and perspiring men and women.

XXII

KELMARSH waited impatiently by the commissioner's box, and noticed that the man was reading a white paper instead of a pink one. After a few minutes there was an exodus of young men and women, the former in bowler hats and big overcoats, the latter in furs and picture hats, or in other finery of a cheaper character. As they went out each one passed a remark to the commissioner, such as, "Cheer O!" "Be Good!" or "Night, night, Charlie," to which he replied with a series of grunts without lifting his eyes from his paper. Then Susy Sullivan came down, and Kelmarsh saw that she was wearing a brown dress with the hat he had bought for her in the Tottenham Court Road—a quite unsuitable arrangement as regards colour and design. But her eyes were sparkling as she put her gloved hand on his arm, and he could see that she was childishly excited.

"I am as hungry as a tiger," she said. "If you'll stand the supper I'll do the cab. Come along."

She dragged him out of the stage door, and holding him by the cuff pushed a way through the crowd outside, and hailed a hansom cab which had previously been shouted for by one of the commissioners in front of the theatre. She jumped on to the step while it was still in motion, and cried out to Kelmarsh to follow her. Then she pushed open the trap, and ordered the man to drive to the Bohemian Restaurant in Lisle Street, "and don't forget I'm hungry." The man guffawed as he closed the trap, and Susy, sitting well back in the cab, and with one of her hands clasping Kelmarsh's knee affectionately, gave a little triumphant laugh.

"Well manoeuvred, wasn't it? I'm as good as gutter-urchin at getting a cab. . . . My! Isn't this lovely? It's my idea of heaven!"

Kelmarsh smiled, but this drive down the Strand in a long line of cabs and omnibuses, another long line streaming past them with jingling harness and the rhythmic clatter of hoofs, the street lights reflected in a golden lake,

as it seemed—the road being wet after rain—and theatre-crowds thronging the pavement on either side, stirred his senses with some of Susy's own exhilaration. As the cabs passed he caught a swift glimpse of men and women in evening dress, clean-shaven, good-looking men, and women who seemed beautiful in their white cloaks with their faces half hidden in soft lace or fur-lined hoods. The night air was fresh, and there came to him that faint, sour smell of the London streets after rain, which to some men is slightly intoxicating, when the lights gleam out of the darkness.

Susy was almost silent, and Kelmarsh saw that her nostrils were quivering and her lips half parted as she smiled out of the cab. She seemed to be breathing in the London atmosphere, and enjoying it with almost an animal pleasure.

"Isn't this all rather stale to you?" said Kelmarsh.

"Stale?" she cried. "My word, no! I don't live in hansoms, you bet, and I shall never get tired of dear, dirty London. Ah . . . this is life!" She gave a little quivering sigh.

"Yes, it's life," said Kelmarsh. "But in another fifty years every one in these crowds will be dead and buried. What do they all live for, I wonder? It always puzzles me."

"You gruesome thing!" said Susy. "What a horrible remark to make before supper?"

It was a short drive, and in a few minutes they were set down before a little restaurant in Soho, where lights shone through short, red window curtains.

Kelmarsh was going to pay, but Susy had a shilling ready and gave it to the cabman.

"The food is your department," she said. She took his arm again and they went inside, Susy leading the way to one of the tables at the end, with a smiling nod to a fat lady who sat behind the bar.

"They know me here," she said. "I often come after the theatre when I'm in funds."

"What are you going to have?" said Kelmarsh.

"Oh, *table d'hôte*, eighteen pence," said Susy. "You get more, and it's cheaper."

Kelmarsh gave the order to a little bullet-headed waiter who was whisking a napkin over the table.

"Quel vin, m'sieur?" he said.

"Do you drink wine?" said Kelmarsh to Susy.

Susy laughed. "What a question! As if one could be virtuous on water!"

Kelmarsh ordered a bottle of St. Julien, taking her advice. He was not "teetotal" on principle, but he had been brought up by Quaker parents, and had never tasted any kind of alcohol. He did not confess this to Susy, but he made a mental resolution to be cautious. He would drink wine, however, for educational reasons, as he had gone to his first play, and he expected to find it just as disappointing.

Susy prattled on vivaciously until Kelmarsh ordered coffee, and she showed an amazing knowledge of London life in its queerest phases. Then she suddenly stopped abruptly, and staring at Kelmarsh with reproachful eye, said—

"You seem to be in the dumps or something. It's like having supper with a deaf mute. What's the matter with you, Mr. Richard Kelmarsh, M.P.?"

"My dear child," said Kelmarsh, "I have been most entertained with your conversation."

"Well, now entertain me," said Susy. "It's your turn."

"Give me a subject," said Kelmarsh, smiling.

"Well, then, what do you think of the show to-night, and what's your opinion of our great British drama?"

Kelmarsh watched a spiral of smoke curl up from his cigarette.

"I hate to think of you in that life," he said. "It's awful—awful."

Susy opened her eyes wide, and put down her coffee-cup with a little clatter.

"My! you do surprise me. What's wrong with it, Mr. M.P.?"

"The whole atmosphere is degrading and immoral,"

said Kelmarsh, flaming into a sudden anger. "Think of those songs! How can you without shame?"

"Do you mean they're naughty?" said Susy, gazing at him with her innocent blue eyes.

"They are abominably indecent," said Kelmarsh.

"Are they?" said Susy. "It's never struck me." She thought for a moment, and then said, "I suppose they *are* a bit sparkling. You get used to that, and think nothing of it. It's all in the business."

"Yes, you get used to them," said Kelmarsh, bitterly. "That's the worst of it. The purest mind must be slowly poisoned by such garbage."

He broke out into bitter abuse of all that he had seen and heard, of Susy's scanty dress, of the coarse women and vulgar air of the company.

Susy swallowed some tears and went very red. "Perhaps you think I'm not a good girl?" she said.

"You are much too good to live in such a vile atmosphere," said Kelmarsh. "I wish I could get you away from it," he added more quietly. "I would give a lot to save you from that abominable life."

"You talk to me as if I were a bad woman," said Susy, biting her lip and flashing an angry look at him. She got up and put on her coat. "We had better be going. You're not what you might call jolly company."

Kelmarsh paid the bill and followed her to the door. "Let us have another cab," he said.

"I shall be glad to get home," said Susy.

He helped her into the cab, and as he sat by her side he took her hand.

"Susy," he said, "don't be angry with me. We are good friends, aren't we?"

"No," said the girl. "You have said horrid—horrible—things."

To Kelmarsh's surprise she burst into tears.

"My dear child," he said, greatly distressed, "don't. For Heaven's sake, don't."

"You despise me," sobbed Susy, shrinking away from him.

He put his arms about her and drew her towards him.

"Susy," he said, "my little Susy . . . I love you . . ."

She was silent for a moment, and he felt her trembling like a trapped bird.

Then she gave a little cry, and catching up one of his hands, kissed it, and made it all wet with her tears.

"Oh, my God!" she said. "Do you mean that? Do you really mean it?"

Kelmarsh was stirred with a strong and passionate emotion. The girl was such a child! He pitied her loneliness in the world. She was so pretty and simple, so fragrant and sweet, as he held her in his arms.

"Don't cry, Susy," he said. "I want you to be my little wife!"

"Oh," said Susy, in a kind of whisper, "I can't believe it! It is too good to be true!" She put her hands up to his head, and pulled it down close to her face. "Are you joking with me?" she said. "I am so vulgar—so ignorant, and you are so noble—so wise. Did you say you loved me?"

"We will make a little home together," said Kelmarsh. "I will take care of you."

She flung her arms about his neck and kissed him on the lips passionately, murmuring little inarticulate words.

Then the cab came to a stop before the boarding-house in Bloomsbury with a sudden jerk.

Kelmarsh got down and helped Susy out. She clung to his left hand while he paid the fare.

He opened the door with his latch-key and turned up the gas, and then Susy put her arms about his neck again and laid her face on his chest, half laughing and half crying.

"Hush!" said Kelmarsh. "Hush!"

Hand-in-hand they crept upstairs, and Kelmarsh took Susy into his own room. He was white and a curious emotion overpowered him, so that he seemed to be moving in a kind of dream.

"Let us sit here and talk," he said. "But we must whisper or the others will hear."

He sat in an armchair, and Susy at his feet held her arms round his waist, laying her head on his knee.

"Say you love me," she said again and again; and Kelmarsh said—

"I love you, Susy. We will marry, and build a little nest together."

Susy got upon her knees and pushed her hair back from her face.

"I cannot believe it," she said. "I cannot believe it. It is a dream!" Then she laughed quietly but joyfully, kissing his hands. "How good it will be to have a little home! How splendid to get away from theatrical boarding-houses!" But she was troubled again. "But I am so ignorant," she said, "and you are so clever. And I haven't any principles!"

Kelmarsh laughed at her, and the fragrance of her hair was sweet to him.

"I will teach you," he said. "You are nothing but a child."

"I have got a wicked temper," said Susy.

"And I have a strong will!" said Kelmarsh.

"I believe you will get tired of me and hate me."

"You will be my loving wife," said Kelmarsh, "and I will be faithful."

"How good! How good!" said Susy, smoothing his face with her soft, plump hand.

So they talked senselessly for half an hour or more, and then Susy slipped away from her lover.

"Don't go," said Kelmarsh. "The whole world is asleep."

"I must go away and dream!" said Susy.

She came back and held his face in both her hands, kissing his lips as though she would never leave him. He held her tight to him, with the tenderness of a man who had never held another woman.

"Good night, Mr. Dick, M.P.," said Susy, and with a glad little laugh she released herself, and went like a mouse to her own room.

XXIII

WHEN Kelmarsh woke next morning, and getting up shaved himself before a window from where he could see the rain pouring from a leaden sky, his mind was busy with thoughts of the previous night. It was with a cold shock that he remembered his scene with Susy in the cab and in his own room, when for the first time in his life he had been moved to passionate love, and had delivered himself to a woman's caresses. It seemed so unreal to him that he half wondered whether it were not a dream. But Susy's hat—the one he had bought for her—lay on his chair; she had forgotten it when she went to her own room, and this thing of felt and feathers could not be denied. It was a symbol of his new relations with womanhood. It was a sign that a woman had come into his life, and that he was no longer a single man shaping his own career. Henceforth Susy was to share his career, and perhaps to shape it differently.

When she tapped at his door after he had finished shaving, he sprang to open it with no reluctance, and when he saw her standing there in a muslin dress, blushing and a little shamefaced, he drew her in to him and held her tight in his arms.

"So it is not a dream after all," said Susy. "I was awake half the night, yet I couldn't believe it. I pinched myself to see, but it was no good." She took hold of his coat-lapels, and laid her gold-red hair upon his chest. "Mr. Richard Kelmarsh, M.P.," she said laughing. "Fancy that! How grand I shall feel!"

"We shall be very poor," said Kelmarsh. "Don't forget that, Susy. You will be the wife of a working man."

"I shall be your wife, Dick," she said. "How strange it is to call you Dick! You scared me terribly when I first knew you. When you looked at me with your grey eyes, my backbone went all wobbly."

"I was much more nervous of you," said Kelmarsh. "You were always laughing at me."

"Well, you know you are rather comical," said Susy. "I shall always laugh at you when you are very, very serious." Before they left one another, Susy asked him a question. "Dick," she said, "when are you going to marry me? Don't keep me waiting too long. I am frightfully impatient, you know."

Kelmarsh was thoughtful. "I suppose we mustn't be in too much of a hurry," he said. "We shall have to get a little house, and fix it up, and so on."

"My!" said Susy. "What a lot of shopping we shall have to do! I shall be in a whirl of joy."

"There will be very little money," said Kelmarsh, pinching her ear. "I am afraid you are an extravagant child. I shall have to teach you economy."

"What a lot you will have to teach me!" said Susy, making eyes at him. Then she said again, "When are you going to marry me, Dick? When are you going to marry me?"

"Do you want me to name the day?" said Kelmarsh, laughing.

Susy became quite serious for a moment. She confessed to him that she would be out of work in a fortnight, and as she would be quite "stony broke," she would have to get another engagement unless "something else happened." She would probably have to go on tour, and that would be hateful.

"Yes," said Kelmarsh. "It would be hateful. I never want you to go on the stage again."

"Well, that settles it," said Susy, with sparkling eyes. "You must marry me in a fortnight, sir."

"Why not?" said Kelmarsh, looking out of his window with a sudden gravity. "Why not?" he repeated, in a lower voice, as though speaking to himself.

Susy flung herself on her knees before him, clasping her arms round him.

"Oh, Dick, in a fortnight I shall be your wife! . . . We will be like two singing-birds in a cosy nest."

"I shall have to work as well as sing," said Kelmarsh, stroking her hair. "You forget that you will be the wife of a Labour M.P. Do you realize what that means, Susy?"

I shall be away from you a lot. I shall not come home till late at night."

"You will find me waiting for you," said Susy, softly. "I shall always be waiting for you."

She sat on the ground with her face on his knees, and for some minutes they were both silent.

"What are you thinking about?" said Kelmarsh.

She looked up, and he saw that her eyes were moist though she was smiling.

"Do you know," she said, "I think I shall be making a noble self-sacrifice in marrying you! Don't think the sacrifice is all on your side. You conceited boy!"

She was talking in her old manner which had first attracted Kelmarsh.

"Where does your sacrifice come in?" said Kelmarsh, smiling.

"It's a very big one," she said, "and don't you forget it. It's all very well for you to denounce the stage and theatrical life. It has been part of my nature. I shall be sorry to leave all the boys and girls, and give up all the old adventures. I shall never get the smell of the grease-paint out of my nose."

"You must forget all that," said Kelmarsh. "You will find new adventures in home-life."

Susy laughed. "Mrs. Richard Kelmarsh, M.P., at home three to six. Music, muffins, and serious conversation!" She sidled down again, pressing close to him. "Oh, it will be a new experience for me. I have quite forgotten home-life. . . . Dick, I will try to be a good wife to you. Don't be too hard on me if I make mistakes."

"We will help each other," said Kelmarsh. "I think we have both got a lot to learn."

"I'm afraid I'm bad at learning," said Susy.

The news of their engagement was not long in getting about among the other boarders. Susy gave herself away to Mrs. Birch, the landlady, who was quite astonished at her extraordinary high spirits, and the way in which she sang in her bedroom. Then one morning, when she jumped out of bed in her nightgown, and seizing the

landlady by both arms, twirled her round the room until she sank panting into the horsehair arm-chair, Mrs. Birch suspected something of the truth.

"My dear," she said, "I think you must be in love. Tell me, who is it?"

Susy blushed furiously. "Guess!" she said. "Guess!"

Mrs. Birch guessed without a moment's hesitation. "Why, who else could it be but Mr. Darlington?" she said. "I'm glad he's spoken at last. Oh, my dear, I am very, very glad."

To her surprise Susy went very red and became extremely angry.

"Darlington!" she said. "You silly old thing! What an absurdity!"

When Mrs. Birch knew the real truth she held up her hands in joyful amazement.

"Well, I never!" she said. "I can hardly believe it. And such a real gentleman as he is."

"Do you mean to say that I am not good enough for him?" said Susy, indignantly. Then she was suddenly filled with humility. "I know," she said, "I am an ignorant, vulgar little cat. I am not fit to black his boots."

"Good gracious!" cried Mrs. Birch. "I hope he'll never make you do that! And such pretty hands as you've got!"

Susy laughed and kissed her. "You dear stupid old creature!" she said.

When Mrs. Birch went downstairs she revealed the news to Em'ly, who immediately dropped a teacup and broke it to pieces. Then she burst into tears.

"Good heavens!" cried Mrs. Birch. "What's the matter, child? I'm not going to scold you; Miss Susy's made me feel that glad."

"To think that she should be took and I should be left!" cried Em'ly, throwing her apron over her head with a little howl.

When Em'ly recovered she sneaked upstairs and went to Miss Ringwood's room.

"Gracious alive!" said the old lady. "What's hap-

pened to the infant? Has that old wretch been bullying you again? Your eyes are all smudged with black lead and salt tears."

"It's a wonder I didn't drop down dead, mum, I was that surprised," said Em'ly. "Miss Susy's been and took on with Mr. Kelmarsh!"

Miss Ringwood, who was learning a new variation of Patience, let the pack of cards fall on to the floor.

"Susy and Richard Kelmarsh!" she said. "God bless my soul! what will Eunice Johnston say?"

"Ah," said Em'ly, darkly. "There's one heart will go crack, pore thing. I saw a tragedy in the tea-leaves no later than yesterday."

"Tragedy!" said Miss Ringwood. "Stuff and nonsense, child. There's more fish in the sea than ever came out."

She gave a little laugh, and there was a soft light in her eyes.

"So there will be a marriage in the house at last!" she said. "I like to see the mating of the birds. It's the most beautiful thing in life."

It was Miss Ringwood who told the news to Eunice Johnston.

"My dear," she said, "I have something to tell you. I hope it will be a pleasant surprise. It's about a young friend of yours."

The old lady looked keenly at the girl, and then took her hand and stroked it gently.

When she told her, Eunice Johnston went very white.

"Don't you feel well, child?" said Miss Ringwood, anxiously.

The girl got up and pressed her hair back from her forehead.

"Oh, perfectly well," she said. "Why shouldn't I?"

"No," said Miss Ringwood, gently. "I see no reason why you shouldn't."

"Thank you for telling me the news," said Eunice Johnston, quietly. "It is most interesting. I hope they will be very happy."

She went out of Miss Ringwood's room, leaving the

old lady staring at the door with a sudden moisture in her eyes, so that she had to take off her spectacles and wipe them with her handkerchief.

Miss Ringwood did not see Eunice Johnston go into her own room and, after closing the door quietly, falter forward to the bed and throw herself upon her knees with her arms outstretched. She did not hear the girl's passion of sobs, nor afterwards her sudden anger as she sprang to her feet and paced the room with a white face and burning eyes, stopping now and again to press the palms of her hands to her temples with a little quivering moan. But perhaps there was some thrill of unknown forces through the brick wall of a London boarding-house, or perhaps the sympathies of a lonely old woman who once desired love, but never found her heart's desire, were so sensitive that she might know when another woman's heart was being tried in the mind's own torture chamber. Certain it is that Miss Ringwood, sitting still in her arm-chair with the scattered court-cards at her feet, seemed to see and to hear the signs of passionate trouble in Eunice Johnston's room. She was tempted to go and tap at that closed door, and entering, to put her arms round the girl, and to say, "My dear, I am an old woman, and I have been through this thing. I was lonely, and when I loved a man so that it seemed I could not live without him, he went away and I never saw him again. He married, and because I could not bear to see his wife and children I lost his friendship as well as his love. That was foolish. Love is the best thing in life, but friendship is the next best."

Miss Ringwood got up from her chair and went to her door, but after holding the handle and listening, and hearing nothing, she shook her head and went back again, and played her game of Patience.

XXIV

THERE was one other person in the boarding-house in Guildford Street who had to be told the news of Susy's engagement with some delicacy, and the mission fell to Mrs. Birch, who was attacked by spasms of nervous anxiety.

It was Em'ly who worked upon her nerves by gloomy prophecies as to the effect of the news upon Mr. Phil Darlington.

"As sure as eggs is eggs," she said, "he'll do somethink desperite. The way he doats on her is puffickly hawful."

Mrs. Birch had a shocking reminiscence of a gentleman who had hanged himself to the gas-bracket in the bath-room because of his love for an actress, though, now she came to think of it, it was because she had driven him mad by taking to drink and threatening him with his own razor. Anyhow, she was an actress, and history, she heard, repeated itself, though for the life of her she couldn't say why.

When Phil Darlington came in at eight o'clock with his usual cheeriness he quickly realized that something had gone wrong. Em'ly, who opened the door to him, had been weeping till her eyes were red, and after a gruesome attempt at brightness by remarking that she was glad she wasn't dead, because it was no burying weather, being that cold, she swallowed a sob and retreated downstairs hurriedly.

When Darlington went into the dining-room he was astonished to find Mrs. Birch in her best black dress with a lace fichu, playing "Scenes that are Brightest" on the piano.

"Hullo!" said Darlington, "you all seem to be very jolly this afternoon. Got a party on? If so, where is it?"

Mrs. Birch rose from the piano and clasped one of his hands.

"Something wonderful has happened," she said, gazing into his eyes.

"Good Lord!" said Darlington. "Has the old 'un hooked it?"

"What old one?" said the landlady, taken by surprise.

"Mr. Birch. . . . You don't mean to say that he has broken his neck or anything? I heard him smashing china again downstairs last week-end."

"No," said Mrs. Birch, resignedly. "He is quite well again. It's about Miss Susy. Don't be surprised."

"About Susy?" said Darlington. He coloured a little, and said anxiously: "She is all right, I hope? She hasn't had an accident?"

"Well, it might be called an accident," said Mrs. Birch, breaking the news gently. "Though nothing serious. On the contrary——"

"What on earth do you mean?" said Darlington, impatiently. "What about Susy?"

"I was never so surprised in my life," said Mrs. Birch. "I always thought he was a nice honourable young gentleman, but I had no idea he would be taken like that."

"Who the devil is *he*?" said Darlington, "and what's he got to do with Susy?"

"It's Mr. Kelmarsch," said Mrs. Birch, letting out the secret somewhat abruptly. "Susy and he have come to an arrangement."

Darlington stared at her blankly. "What sort of an arrangement?"

"She'll be the wife of an M.P. before the month's out," said Mrs. Birch, with a little note of triumph in her voice. Then she broke down, and with a sudden gush of tears said: "Oh, Mr. Darlington, I am as glad as if it was myself. Don't grudge the dear child her joy, and I beg of you not to do anything desperate. Remember, it's a most respectable lodging-house, and I've always helped you liberally at table."

Darlington put on his bowler hat and strode to the door. "Susy marry that prig!" he said fiercely. "I'll see about that."

Mrs. Birch rushed after him and clung to his hand. "Please, please," she said, "don't do anything rash!"

Miss Susy's very fond of you, I'm sure ; and Mr. Kelmarsh is quite the gentleman."

"Gentleman !" said Darlington. "He's nothing but a Burslem bounder. It's the worst type I've ever struck, and I've seen some."

He wrenched his hand free, so that he almost hurt her, and she gave a little cry. He seemed sorry for it, and looked down at her with a not unkind expression.

"Don't you worry," he said. "I shan't make a fool of myself. But I like Susy too well to see her life spoilt by a canting hypocrite."

He went out and slammed the front door after him, leaving Mrs. Birch, and Em'ly, whose ear had been very near the keyhole of the dining-room door, victims of a morbid anxiety. Em'ly told horrible stories from the newspapers of gentlemen who had murdered their sweet-hearts and then weltered in their own gore. She was also afraid that actors and actresses especially made a habit of those things.

Darlington really did nothing desperate. He called for Susy at the stage door after watching the performance from the pit.

"Is this true about you and Kelmarsh ?" he said quietly when they were outside.

Susy put her arm through his and squeezed it. "Yes, Phil," she said ; "aren't you glad ? It seems too good to be true, but it's a giddy little fact."

"I would have swept a crossing for you," said Darlington. "If anyone were ever pals, it's you and me."

"The best of pals, Phil, barring frequent quarrels," said Susy.

"Good Lord !" said Darlington. "It's inconceivable to think of you marrying that fellow. He's nothing but a walking morality with a bundle of principles instead of a heart."

"If you talk like that," said Susy, unlinking her arm, "I will never let you speak to me again."

Darlington apologized. "If you're in love with him," he said, "I've nothing more to say." Then he stopped and looked into her face in the light of a shop window.

"But *are* you in love with him, Susy? *Are* you? I can't believe it!"

"I am in love with him from my head to my heels," said Susy.

"I'm sorry for it," said Darlington, huskily. "Once I thought you cared for me. Do you remember that night at Manchester, in the little reading-room of the Star Hotel?"

"Don't," said Susy, sharply. Her face went crimson. "That was in the old days. I was nothing but a silly child."

"You're nothing but a child now," said Darlington. "But I would have taken care of you. I am a child too—we're all children in the profession—and we would have played the game together—played it till the curtain dropped and the lights went out." He passed his hand swiftly across his eyes. "That's another little dream gone. I suppose I'll have to go on alone. You'll never wait for me again in the wings, Susy?"

The girl's eyes were a little moist. "In another two weeks I shall say good-bye to the profession. Dick doesn't fancy me before the footlights. I shall be sorry for some things—sorry to part from the pals. One gets some fun out of the life, in spite of its ups and downs."

"If 'Dick' doesn't like it, I should tell him to go to the devil," said Darlington.

"Then I should have to go with him," said Susy, laughing. "Where he goes I go. Isn't that Biblical?"

"It's rough on me, whatever it is," said Darlington.

She looked up into his face as they walked down Guildford Street.

"Try to be friends with Dick for my sake," she said. "I should be sorry if we made a quarrel of it."

"Oh, I'll be very gentle with him," said Darlington; and Susy did not hear him say "curse the prig" under his breath.

But for Susy's sake he kept his word, and when later he next met Kelmarsh in the hall he held out his hand and said quite cordially—

"I heard your news, Kelmarsh. May I say you are a lucky fellow?"

Kelmarsh was a little cold in the acknowledgment, but he shook hands, and as he looked into Darlington's face he realized that the man had been his rival and that he was taking his defeat generously. He had a better opinion of him. The fellow was not such a cad after all.

XXV

SUSY SULLIVAN had to postpone her marriage until a fortnight later after all, because she had to mend and make some clothes, and there was no time for needlework while she was engaged at the theatre. Kelmarsh also had a difficulty in finding a house suitable to his income, and not in too squalid a neighbourhood. He finally fixed upon a little "villa residence" in a street off the Electric Avenue, Brixton. It was £32 a year, and had the advantage of being within five minutes of an excellent line of tramcars with an all-night service, so that he could get home easily from the House. After much mental arithmetic, he found that he could put aside £50 for furnishing his new home. This was partly made by a present of £20 from his father and mother, to whom he had written with the news of his engagement. His mother had sent him a long and loving letter, in which she hoped that his wife was a good woman, with faith in God, and his father added a few lines, wishing him every happiness. "I can only hope," he said, "that you will be blessed with such a wife as your mother has been to me."

A little later, Kelmarsh invited them to the wedding; but he explained that as neither he nor Susy believed in any definite creed, the ceremony would be a civil one at the registry office. This brought another letter from his mother, begging him to sanctify his marriage before God.

"I cannot bear to think," she said, "that my son will begin a new life without some belief in its religious meaning. Marriage to be holy must surely be celebrated by more than the signing of a book. Your father forbids me to be present at such a deliberately sinful act. Oh, my dear Richard, think what that is to me. Your mother cannot attend her son's wedding!"

Kelmarsh wrote gently to her again, defending his principles.

"I am so deeply conscious," he said, "of the sanctity of marriage that I cannot enter the married state by a ceremony which to me would be idle and superstitious. I hate to give you pain by such words, but I must be honest to myself and to you."

He did not tell his mother that he had had some trouble with Susy over this subject. She also thought that they ought to be married in a church or a chapel. She was not religious, she said, though she sometimes said funny little prayers that must amuse God if He ever got to hear of them. She remembered dimly going to church as a child, and seeing a blaze of lighted candles and people in things like nightgowns and embroidered blankets. Looking back on these memories, she thought the people must have been priests, and the place a Catholic church. Since her mother died she had not been taught any religion, but she did think a wedding ought to be in a church. It always was so in books and plays, and it was a pretty idea, anyhow.

Kelmarsh argued the point with her, and explained that marriage was the fulfilment of a natural law which needed no higher sanction and no special ceremony.

Susy was inclined to be a little argumentative, and wanted to know how he knew all these things so pat. But when Kelmarsh threatened that he would get angry if she went on talking about a matter on which he had made up his mind, she burst out laughing, and, pulling his head down, said that as long as he made her his wife he might marry her by an incantation over a kitchen poker.

They went shopping together in the Electric Avenue, Brixton—a wonderful place, which seemed to be specially designed for young married couples on limited means, and

where they bought a whole bedroom suite for £4 10s. and a dining-room suite, including a "mahogany" sideboard and an ottoman covered with a rose-chintz, for £5 5s. They also discovered a remarkable place called a "sixpenny-halfpenny shop," where the articles were all one price. There was such a wonderful variety of articles at sixpence halfpenny each, or sixpence halfpenny the set, that Susy could not tear herself away. It seemed that one could buy any domestic utensil and every adornment for the home for the magic price. Susy was able to stock here new home with pots and pans of every description, china and glass for table service, corner cupboards, Britannia metal spoons and forks, "as good as silver," looking-glasses, and other necessities for a happy domestic life. But Kelmarsh had some trouble with her when she passed from necessities to luxuries. She was seized with admiration for sixpenny-halfpenny vases, and sets of vases for sixpence halfpenny so gorgeously hideous that he trembled at the sight of them. And after he had dissuaded her from these things by sheer will-power, she gave a little scream of delight when she discovered a little picture gallery of coloured prints and oleographs neatly framed in light oak at the familiar price.

They were pleasant hours, however, in spite of lovers' tiffs, and Kelmarsh looked forward gladly to the time when Susy and he would be together in their little house. The purchase of linen and other things for domestic use was a foretaste of the beautiful intimacy of marriage, and their laughter and little embarrassments and squabbles, the way in which Susy revealed all her strange mixture of worldly wisdom and childishness and petulance, gave to Kelmarsh a new experience of the simple pleasures of life.

During these weeks, however, Kelmarsh could not spend more than a few hours every day with Susy, except on Saturdays and Sundays, and on Wednesday afternoons, when the House rose at four o'clock. The Liberal Government had brought in three important Bills, on Education, Licensing and Housing Reform, and the session was made notable by some of the keenest political debates within the memory of old Parliamentary hands. The Labour party

under Dunstan's leadership was holding a strong and independent position, and Dunstan's amendments were extremely disconcerting to the Liberals, because more than once they carried the support of the Conservative opposition. His attack upon the Licensing Bill as a superficial remedy for the evil of drink, which had its roots in the social condition of the people, and was not to be cured by restrictions in the sale of liquor, received the enthusiastic applause of the Opposition, who were not slow to realize that Dunstan's words would help to turn the advanced and socialistic sections of society against the Liberal policy, as their own defence of the "poor man's beer" would carry weight with a mob whose animal passions were not to be thwarted by political idealism. On the Education Bill the Labour party was divided against itself, and thus had no strength. To Kelmarsh's surprise, Dunstan defended denominational teaching in schools, and argued that the Catholic and Church of England voluntary schools turned out a higher class of children than the elementary schools in which there was only secular education. "I belong to no definite form of faith myself," he said, "but I recognize facts when I see them, and I say it would be a calamity for this nation if the voluntary schools were penalized in order to pander to the intolerance of those who boast falsely of being 'free' thinkers." Kelmarsh was for the first time strongly opposed to Dunstan, and argued with him in favour of absolutely secular state-aided schools.

"The curse of our whole system of education," he said, "is due to the bigotry of priests and parsons."

"Fudge," said Dunstan. "You are talking theories again. Put them in your pocket, my lad, and study facts. Go into the schools and compare the children. Follow their careers after their school-days. I know what I'm talking about—there are fewer drunkards, fewer wife-beaters, fewer thieves and scoundrels among those who have been brought up in Church schools than among those who have learnt arithmetic at the expense of Christian morality. Oh, hang the inconsistency! I am not a man of religion myself. Perhaps that is my misfortune. But I know it's good for the kids."

To Kelmars these debates, which called out the best intelligence and abilities of both sides of the House, were of real educational value, and he followed them with the closest attention. The varying views of men from every part of the country, and of every class and creed, some of them influenced by strong prejudices of class and caste, some of them getting straight to the heart of a subject with an evident desire to find the truth, some of them revealing a broad social philosophy, based upon years of thought and study, many of them showing an extraordinary skill in dissecting a plausible argument and exhibiting its weak spots, gave him a new and continually increasing respect for a body of men whom on first acquaintance he had derided and despised. Almost unconsciously his mind expanded, and became more tolerant towards opposing views. His sense of logic forced him to see the strength of facts, marshalled against his own crudely formed political tenets, his real honesty of mind made him respect opinions which were based on knowledge. The atmosphere of the House influenced him with its subtle effect on the character of individuals, and softened down some of his awkward corners of a rather "angular" temperament. Gradually, too, he found himself more at ease with his fellow-members, and he lost his sense of isolation in the crowd.

XXVI

UNDOUBTEDLY some of this change in him was due to Basil Chilvers, who not only took frequent opportunities of chatting with him, but introduced him to many of the younger Conservatives. As his natural shyness and reserve wore off by familiarity with his surroundings, he was able to hold his own in conversation with these men of easy manners and easy opinions. On their side, they seemed to find an interest in his dogmatism

and extreme Radical views. Occasionally he became over-heated, and brought upon himself the quiet but very pointed rebukes of men whose manners, at least, were better than his own. When Chilvers was about, however, he had the gift of restraining Kelmarsh from too violent an expression of speech, and his charming amiability and tact were like oil upon the stormy waters of Kelmarsh's soul. A real friendship had grown up between these men so utterly different in character and experience. Chilvers seemed to find a continual pleasure in studying Kelmarsh's point of view. He would sit back and listen with his quizzical smile while Kelmarsh waxed passionate on his pet theories, troubling only occasionally to put in a word which disconcerted the young Labour member, or made him laugh, in spite of his earnestness, at a few words of satire or light-hearted nonsense.

"I believe you look upon me as a curious animal," said Kelmarsh once. "You are always drawing me out for the sake of studying my peculiar psychology."

"My dear fellow," said Chilvers, "I am vastly interested in humanity, and I have never encountered the Radical mind in such a whole, complete, and unspoilt type. To me you represent the spirit of the age, the youthful spirit of revolt against authority and tradition. I delight in disagreeing with you."

"And you are the most reactionary and conservative nature I have ever argued with," said Kelmarsh.

"Well, it is good for us to be friends," said Chilvers.

"Look here, Kelmarsh," he said one day, "I want you to do me a favour. I want you to let me introduce you to my uncle and cousin. They are in town just now, and I think you would have a pleasant evening."

"Do you want to exhibit me as a kind of performing monkey?" said Kelmarsh, "because I'm hanged if I will submit to the process."

The idea amused Chilvers, and he laughed unaffectedly. "It's not that," he said. "To be perfectly frank, I think it would do you good to see the home-life of a Catholic peer, and of what in your snobbish way you *will* call the upper ten. I believe you think London society is like

Rome before the downfall. Come and take a peep at it, and see it in one of its quietest and old-fashioned aspects."

"I don't know how to behave in such company," said Kelmarsh, with a rather bitter humility. "I'm only a Burslem cad, after all."

Chilvers put his arm through Kelmarsh's. "Don't talk such confounded nonsense," he said. "You know you think you're mighty superior."

He prevailed upon Kelmarsh to leave the House early and go with him to Lord Cossington's in Belgrave Square.

"Belgravia," said Chilvers, as they drove from Westminster in a hansom, "is one of the slum areas of your upper ten. It is what you might call the sanctuary of the submerged tenth."

"It is better than Union Street, Bermondsey," said Kelmarsh. "Do people bash their wives' brains out in this district?"

"No," said Chilvers; "but they sometimes break their women's hearts. One of the things you've got to learn, Kelmarsh, is that human nature is the same in every class. It only finds expression in slightly different ways."

"What subjects am I to avoid?" said Kelmarsh, as they came near the house. "I am sure to put my foot in it."

"Oh, for Heaven's sake be natural!" said Chilvers, anxiously. Then he added after a moment's reflection: "You might perhaps go a little slow about secular education. My dear old uncle is a devout Catholic, and would die as heroically for the faith as some of his ancestors. Then, too, you might remember that in his young days he was the dandy of the 5th Dragoons, and wears the V.C. when he goes to Court. Don't preach the Tolstoyan ideal of non-resistance. It might worry him a little."

Kelmarsh groaned. "I had better sit mum and say nothing."

"No, no," said Chilvers. "I want you to make a good impression."

"Yes," said Kelmarsh. "You must make your monkey play his tricks."

Chilvers pressed his arm with a touch of remonstrance.

They were on the steps of the quiet old house in Belgrave Square, and at the jangle of a bell down in the area, which Chilvers said always made him think he was the cats'-meat man calling for orders, the door was opened by a gentleman who looked like a bishop, but whom Kelmarsh afterwards discovered to be the senior footman.

"Any company to-night, Pilkington?" said Chilvers, helping Kelmarsh off with his coat.

"Yes, Mr. Basil, sir," said Pilkington, "some of his lordship's old friends, some young gentlemen of the Guards, Mr. Phillimore the novelist, and Father Browne. They're already in the drawing-room, with Miss Ursula."

"Well, we will join them," said Chilvers. "You need not announce us."

He led Kelmarsh through the hall, which was crowded on each wall with hunting trophies and old weapons, and up a broad oak staircase lined with sporting prints and coloured engravings by Bartolozzi.

He opened the door at the top of the staircase and took Kelmarsh into the drawing-room. It was a big square room, with long gilt mirrors on the wall and heavy old-fashioned furniture. Kelmarsh found himself facing a company of about twelve men scattered about the room, with coffee-cups on their knees. Some of the younger men were smoking cigarettes, and all were listening to the throbbing tremolo of a violin, with a pianoforte accompaniment. Kelmarsh saw the musicians. At the far end of the room a girl in white stood in a soft glamour of candlelight. Her face was resting on the body of her violin, and her right arm was moving rhythmically as she swept her bow across the strings. It was a charming girl's face, with dark hair loosely looped about it, and with grey eyes that seemed very serious as she played one of Mendelssohn's "*Lieder ohne Worte*" with a melting tenderness. Kelmarsh recognized it as the original of the portrait in Basil Chilvers's rooms. The face had the same touch of spirituality, and rather wistful sadness. But when she brought her bow down like the flick of a whip at the last note she gave a little laugh, and her eyes sparkled with a girlish merriment as the gentlemen clapped hands, and a boy's voice said "Ripping!"

"Those last bars were a scramble," she said. "You took it too fast, Billy."

"Billy," who was an old-young man of thirty-five, with greyish hair and a delicate boyish face—he was afterwards introduced to Kelmarsh as Phillimore the novelist—got up from his stool and protested against such an aspersion upon his musical and moral character.

"It was your fault, Ursula. You indulged in too much tremolo. It's one of your besetting sins."

The girl touched him lightly on the shoulder with her bow.

"How you do bluff, Billy!" she said.

Then she caught sight of Chilvers and Kelmarsh at the door, and came towards them. Kelmarsh watched her as she came, and it seemed to him that he had never seen such simple and unconscious grace. Her head was poised a little high, but the expression in her eyes was sweet and gracious and smiling. Kelmarsh recognized the smile. It belonged also to Basil Chilvers, and to a white-haired, florid old man with keen grey eyes, and the wreck of a former beauty on his face, who stood—a straight, soldierly figure—with his back to the fireplace.

"I am glad you have come, Basil," said the girl, quickly. "Is this your friend, Mr. Kelmarsh?"

She shook hands with Kelmarsh before waiting for the answer, and before the young Labour member had recovered from an awkward little bow.

"Basil has often spoken to me about you," said the girl. "You seem great friends. My father will be very glad to know you."

She took him across the room to the white-haired old man with the keen eyes.

"This is Mr. Richard Kelmarsh, father."

The old man gave a hawk's glance at Kelmarsh and then gripped his hand.

"How kind of you to come," he said, with charming old-fashioned courtesy. "And it was good of Basil to bring you. Very good of you, Basil, my boy."

Kelmarsh was rather startled by this cordiality. It seemed so frank and sincere, as if he were a man of high

distinction, instead of being the youngest and most silent member of the Labour party.

"It is very kind of you, my lord," he said nervously. It was the first time he had ever spoken to a peer, and he wondered whether it would have been better to call him "sir."

Ursula brought him some coffee, and put a box of cigarettes on a little table by his side.

"We all smoke here," she said.

"Yes," said Lord Cossington, "these young dogs here bring their barrack-room manners into drawing-rooms nowadays. By gad, in my young days smoking in the presence of ladies was one of the mortal sins. What d'ye say to that, Father Browne?"

He turned to a tall, stout man with a big, jovial face who was telling an anecdote to Phillimore and shaking with quiet laughter. Kelmarsh looked at him curiously. He had never sat in the same company with a Catholic priest. He seemed a good-natured fellow, but he was too fat. "He probably over-eats himself," thought Kelmarsh. He was rather surprised, however, at the frank, hearty, and manly behaviour of Father Browne. He had not the ecclesiastical drawl, or the curate's simper, or the self-conscious sanctity of some of the clergy he had heard on Burslem platforms. And he told excellent stories—stories which made Kelmarsh laugh in spite of his prejudice. It seemed that he had been a soldier, and was a subaltern in Lord Cossington's own troop of horse. He recalled memories of their old campaigning days and light-hearted adventures in which the Colonel had risked his life for a little frolic.

Lord Cossington laughed heartily at the reminiscences, and blushed like a schoolboy at one or two of them in which his pluck was too apparent. He turned the tables on the priest by telling the story about a certain bright-eyed lady at Cape Town with whom a certain lieutenant had been desperately entangled.

"None of those adventures for you now, my reverend friend," said the old peer, his hawk-like eyes sparkling and his lips twitching mirthfully.

"Ah!" said Father Browne; "but I have some delightful memories."

There was a roar of laughter at this, and at the end of it the priest was led to the piano by Ursula, and commanded to play as a penance for his past sins. He played without music, dreamily and bewitchingly, one melody melting into another, and then he broke into song, in a clear, rich voice, with a melting tenderness. He sang "Drink to me only with thine eyes," and Kelmarsh noticed that both Lord Cossington and Ursula were so moved that there was a suspicious moisture in their own eyes. The old man had his arm round his daughter's waist, and Kelmarsh was struck by the strong likeness of the girl to her father. She carried herself straight as he did, and she had the same poise of the head—a little haughty at first sight, yet not so when one saw the sweetness of the mouth and the kindly light in the grey eyes.

"My wife always loved to hear you sing that, John," said Lord Cossington, when the priest was silent, the deep chords of the piano still thrilling under his touch, and the vibration of his voice still throbbing through the room.

"I know," said the priest, quietly.

Ursula moved over to Kelmarsh. "Do you sing?" she said.

"No," said Kelmarsh. "I have no voice."

Ursula sat on a low chair by his side. "You have a good speaking voice," she said.

"How do you know that?" said Chilvers, rather abruptly.

"My aunt, Mrs. Denton, told me. She said how your voice thrilled the audience at the Caxton Hall."

"Is Mrs. Denton your aunt?" said Kelmarsh, much astonished. He remembered the silver-haired lady who had taken the chair at that meeting when he made his first speech on women's suffrage."

"Yes," said Ursula Chilvers. "She is my father's sister. I am very fond of her; but I am sorry to say father and she do not get on well together. He is very much opposed to her ideas."

"And you?" said Kelmarsh. "Do you believe in women's liberty?"

Ursula smiled. "Oh yes, in liberty!" she said. "But I am old-fashioned, like my father. I do not want any more liberty than I have."

"But you are a Catholic, aren't you?" said Kelmarsh.

Ursula gave him a straight look out of her grey eyes. "Yes," she said. "All the Chilverses have been loyal to the old faith."

"And have you liberty?" said Kelmarsh, not to be daunted by this touch of pride—this false pride, as it seemed to him.

"Perfect liberty," said Ursula, quietly. "We obey, but we have free will to disobey. Perhaps you don't believe in obedience?"

"No," said Kelmarsh. "The world has only progressed by revolt."

"Oh!" said Ursula, with a quick breath. "I cannot let you say that. Life should be ruled by law and discipline. It is pride which created disorder and anarchy, in society as in an army. Good soldiers are not too proud to obey their officers."

"A good soldier is nothing but a slave," said Kelmarsh. "He must shoot his brother at the word of command."

Ursula gave him another quick glance. "My father was a good soldier," she said quietly. "And I am proud to be a soldier's daughter."

Kelmarsh flushed at her rebuke. He was conscious of having been ill-mannered. He led the conversation back to its origin.

"I am sorry you do not believe in women's suffrage," he said more gently. "I think every good woman should help on the cause. I believe so much in women's influence for good in public life."

"I have been brought up with old-fashioned ideas," said Ursula. "I find so much work to do at home and in the village where we live for most of the year. It seems to me so many girls desert their plain and obvious duties for the excitement of a more public life. Round our Manor House none of the farmers' daughters help in the dairy or

in the home nowadays. They have become 'young ladies,' and play tennis and hockey all day long. I think that liberty does not make them happy."

"It is better than the old domestic tyranny," said Kelmarsh. "Besides, that has nothing to do with women having a vote. Surely women should have some share in making the laws they have to obey."

Ursula laughed, and said very simply: "I know you are right in theory, and I am so very ignorant of all these things. It is only what I feel on the subject, and, really, I have no right to argue."

During the whole evening Chilvers had lain on a great tiger-skin before the fireplace, speaking very little, but watching and listening, with an expression of mild interest and amusement. He now got up lazily and sat down straddlewise on an oak stool close to Ursula, talking to her in a low voice. Kelmarsh was left for awhile next to a young man with a few bristly hairs on his upper lip, whom he discovered to be a lieutenant in the Guards. He asked Kelmarsh whether he had been to the Gaiety Theatre lately, and what he thought of Totty Trevor. When Kelmarsh confessed that he had never been to the Gaiety in his life, and had not the pleasure of knowing Miss Trevor, he seemed so surprised that he was struck dumb and did not offer another remark.

Kelmarsh found himself listening to Father Browne describing some scenes of low life in his East End mission. He described them with a broad humour to Phillimore the novelist, who laughed quietly at the priest's narratives, but now and again Father Browne touched a deeper note and his voice vibrated when he told of the hardships and brave struggles of some of the poor devils in his district.

"The old Colonel there is my most generous friend," he said. "I have to refuse his charity sometimes. He would pauperize all my parishioners. I have only got to tell him of some poor devil down on his luck and he sends me a cheque by the next post."

A little later Kelmarsh got up and took his leave. Lord Cossington put his hand on his shoulder as he said good-bye.

"You are a young man to be a member of Parliament," he said. "I envy you your opportunities. But do not put the pace on too fast. Go slow with the giddy old world. It mustn't spin too quickly." Then he added with the most cordial kindness, "Come and see us again, Mr. Kelmarsh. Ursula and I would be delighted—honoured."

Ursula herself held his hand for a moment and looked into his eyes in her sincere and simple way.

"It was so good of you to come," she said. "I shall always be at home on Wednesday afternoons during the next few weeks while we are in town. I wish you would come to tea and teach me something about politics."

"Oh, your cousin should do that!" said Kelmarsh, with a little embarrassment.

"What, Basil!" said the girl with a smiling glance in the direction of her cousin. "He knows nothing at all about such things. He is far too lazy."

Basil Chilvers answered her challenging look with a laugh.

"You will never give me credit for any serious purpose in life," he said. He turned to Kelmarsh. "I am going part of your way," he said. "Shall we go together?"

They walked from Belgrave Square to Piccadilly, and after a few words about the weather, which Englishmen can never forget, Chilvers said abruptly to his companion—

"Well, what is your point of view?"

"Look here, Chilvers," said Kelmarsh, rather savagely, "I object to your sense of humour. Why should you always make me a butt for your cheap wit?"

"My dear fellow," said Chilvers, "why should you always be so suspicious of my friendship? Surely I can ask you a simple question about your impressions of new people? Come, now, what did you think of Father Browne?"

"He is too fat," said Kelmarsh.

Chilvers laughed. "Yes," he said, "that comes from the wholesome diet of semi-starvation. He lives on £120 a year in an East End parish, and gives half his substance

to the poor. . . . Well, what of my old uncle? Did you like him?"

"No one could dislike him," said Kelmarsh frankly. "He seems as simple as a child, and just as ignorant of modern life."

"Yes, he's mediæval," said Chilvers. "I sometimes think he is like Chaucer's gentleman, 'a very parfit gentle knight—true of his word, sober, piteous, and free.' I am glad he appealed to you. He is a type of all that is best in his class. There are thousands more like him."

Chilvers did not ask Kelmarsh what he thought of Ursula. But he said presently—

"My cousin was much interested in your conversation, Kelmarsh."

"We nearly quarrelled," said Kelmarsh. "I behaved like a boor."

"No. She liked your frankness. She wants to meet you again."

The two men separated at Piccadilly Circus, and Kelmarsh walked on alone thinking of his evening's experience.

When he got back to Guildford Street, Susy was waiting for him, and pouted because he came back so late.

"I don't believe you love me a bit," she said, and then held her face out for him to kiss.

"Look here," she exclaimed, when he touched her cheek with his lips, "I am not a marble statue. I shan't break if you put your arms round me."

Kelmarsh smiled. "I am rather tired, Susy," he said, "and we can't be always kissing." He saw that tears suddenly sprang to her eyes, as though he had been unkind to her. He put his arms round her and drew her down on to his knee. "My dear little Susy!" he said. "You know I love you. In a week we shall be man and wife. How splendid!"

She nestled close to him, and they talked nonsense till it was time to go to bed.

XXVII

SUSY SULLIVAN and Richard Kelmarsh were married at the Holborn Registry Office at twelve o'clock on a morning in June, in the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Dunstan and Mrs. Birch, who acted as witnesses. The ceremony would have been over in five minutes, but for the emotion of Mrs. Birch, who burst into tears after signing the book, and had to be supplied with smelling-salts from a neighbouring chemist's shop. Mrs. Dunstan, who was a kind motherly soul, went to fetch them, and consoled the landlady by saying that she was taken in exactly the same way when her youngest sister was married, though she couldn't understand why, seeing as marriage was a joyful state, and she could truly say that her own Dan had never disappointed her or given her an unkind word.

Dunstan himself was in a jovial mood, and chaffed Susy and Kelmarsh in a bluff and cheery way. He was quite sure that Kelmarsh would be all the better for being married. It would cure him of some of his youthful cynicism.

"Take my advice, Mrs. Kelmarsh, and rule him with a firm hand. My wife can give you some wrinkles on domestic discipline. She rules me with a rod of iron."

Susy was so delightfully excited that she laughed rather hysterically when she signed her name, and then flinging her arms round her husband kissed him ardently, regardless of the grim-faced registrar, who seemed to be making out a certificate of death instead of a marriage contract. Kelmarsh was rather embarrassed by Susy's public demonstration of affection, and released himself from her arms so hurriedly that Dunstan roared with laughter as he slapped him on the back.

"What a shy young feller it is!" he said to Susy. "But wait till he gets home with you, ma'am!"

The little party went back to the boarding-house in Bloomsbury in two four-wheeled cabs. Mrs. Birch, at the request of the boarders, who had all subscribed in a most generous way, had arranged a wedding-breakfast for the

newly married couple, and for three days beforehand had, with Em'ly, prepared a quantity of jam-tarts, jellies, and other good things. It was Em'ly who opened the door to the husband and wife. When they started for the registry office she had flung an old shoe after them, and now she waited for them with a cupful of rice, which she flung at them so suddenly that Kelmarsh was inclined to be angry with her. But Susy burst out laughing, and when Em'ly, dropping the cup so that it broke to pieces on the doorstep, flung her arms round the young wife, with a howl of emotion, she kissed the girl with a sudden rush of tears from her own eyes.

In the dining-room all the boarders had assembled in their best clothes, and the table was already spread for the wedding-breakfast. In the places reserved for the newly married pair there was a little pile of presents done up in tissue-paper. After the preliminary congratulations, and when Mrs. Birch, rustling in a new black-silk dress, had arranged every one round the table, Mr. Vinnicombe, in a frock-coat, white waistcoat, and pepper-and-salt trousers, rose and cleared his throat, while Phil Darlington, who had been behaving with forced hilarity, rapped the table with his knife-handle.

"As the oldest lodger," said Mr. Vinnicombe, "and as a retired Civil Servant of forty years' standing, I may be permitted—in fact, I have been requested—to take the lead in offering the congratulations of the boarders upon this happy event. Our estimable landlady—I refer to Mrs. Birch"—he paused while the boarders said, "Hear, hear!"—"has symbolized by the good things on this festive board, where we are all so plenteously served day by day, our rejoicings upon the present occasion. It has been a source of great gladness to all of us here—I think I correctly interpret the general feeling?"—he paused again, seeking for confirmation of his statement—"that Miss Susy Sullivan, whose high spirits have always added to the gaiety of this—er—establishment, and Mr. Richard Kelmarsh, M.P., whose high ideals and earnest purpose—in spite of occasional political differences inevitable in a civilized state of society—have been drawn to one another by that

mutual attraction of souls which, for want of a better word, is generally described as—er—love. I feel that this will result—and I again believe I express the general conviction”—Miss Ringwood said, “Precisely!”—“that this will result in a life of calm and placid happiness and unalloyed contentment, and, in short, connubial bliss. I am proud and honoured to propose on behalf of my colleagues—I mean my fellow-boarders—the health of the bride and bridegroom.”

This speech was received with general applause, and then Darlington got up, and, raising an empty coffee-cup, said rather huskily—

“I second that proposal. Susy, God bless you. Kelmarsh, you’re a lucky devil. We all envy you.”

Dunstan was the next to speak. He alluded in warm terms to Kelmarsh’s ability and intellectual power, and sincerity of purpose. “He has got a lot to learn,” he said, “but he’s a good learner. I wish I had half his brains.” He prophesied that he would go far in politics, and that he would leave the world a little better than he found it. “That is all any of us can hope to do.” As for Mrs. Kelmarsh, Dunstan was sure no man could have a prettier or a more charming wife. “If my old girl weren’t here, I should say I had fallen in love with her myself.”

“Don’t mind me, Dan,” said Mrs. Dunstan, laughing unaffectedly.

Susy cried a little during these speeches, and Kelmarsh was touched by the general kindness. He rose and made a brief speech, thanking them all. He knew they all loved Susy, while he was almost a stranger to them. “But I love her too,” he said, smiling, “and you need not fear that I shall be unkind. There is a little house at Brixton where there will always be an open door for friends from the boarding-house in Bloomsbury.”

Susy broke down a little when the time came to say good-bye. She flung her arms round Mrs. Birch’s neck and hugged her, as though the landlady, who was crying also, were her mother. Then she kissed Miss Ringwood with equal affection, and, to Kelmarsh’s secret annoyance, she gave her cheek to Mr. Vinnicombe and Mr. Henderson,

and the two City gentlemen, and last of all to Phil Darlington. Darlington kissed her twice with his arm round her waist.

"God bless you, little girl," he said. "Don't forget your old pals."

The colour streamed into Kelmarsh's face at this little scene. He could not understand Susy being so free with her caresses. Surely it was not quite the right thing! And with Darlington, above all. He saw Eunice Johnston's eyes fixed on him, and he forced a smile to his face.

She came over and shook hands with him. "I hope we shall often meet again," she said. Her eyes had a troubled look, and her under-lip was quivering a little.

"Why, yes," said Kelmarsh. "Susy will always be glad to see you. And, of course, we shall meet on public platforms."

"Anyhow, I must thank you now for all your kindness," said Eunice. "You have been a very good friend to me. I shall never forget it."

"It was you who befriended me," said Kelmarsh. "You have taught me so many things. I do hope this will make no difference."

She did not answer, but, pressing his hand again, turned away. She slipped out of the room while Susy was saying her last good-byes. Then a four-wheeled cab was whistled up, and in a few minutes Kelmarsh was driving off to Brixton with Susy by his side. Her head was on his shoulder, and she was crying quietly like a tired child.

XXVIII

MR. AND MRS. KELMARSH were very much amused with married life. On the whole it was really the most delightful game in the world, in spite of poverty. Indeed, it would not have been half

such fun in the early days if, as Susy said, they had been rolling in riches. The joy of the thing lay in scheming out little luxuries on limited means, in stinting and scraping here in order to be delightfully and recklessly extravagant there. To have nothing but bread-and-butter for breakfast gave an additional relish to a supper of steak and onions with potatoes baked in their jackets, and twopenny tarts from the pastrycook's round the corner. Shopping was an exciting adventure in practical arithmetic, and to be sixpence on the right side of the preliminary estimate of domestic expenses was as good in its way to Richard and Susy as if they had gained five shillings. Susy was always rejoiced on a Saturday night, when Richard and she set out for the Electric Avenue to buy provender for the next day's meals. She discovered that by going fairly late the most wonderful bargains could be obtained. The butchers were eager to sell off their stock, and would take "any offer you like, lady, and all prime stuff." There were heavy reductions on fruit and vegetables, and the flower-sellers, hoarse with shouting through a busy day, would sell market bunches at cost price. Under the glaring electric lights there were many young couples like Richard and Susy, discussing quietly before shop windows how much they could spare for coveted things of domestic utility. Many of them had perambulators with them, and placed their packages at the feet of sleeping babies. Susy blushed, but laughed very happily when Richard suggested that they, too, might one day wheel home their purchases.

They were unable to afford a servant, though Richard hoped that if he could get any designing work to do in London they could have a little maid in the house. But Susy protested that she preferred to do all the work herself, and to have no onlooker in their little paradise. Certainly for a few weeks it was as good as a picnic. Richard became a master at lighting a fire with the help of candle-ends and bacon-rind, and under Susy's instructions he learnt to wipe up plates and dishes with only an occasional smash—though it is astonishing how plates *do* slip through the fingers, especially when there is a brick floor underneath!

Unfortunately, Richard was away for many hours every

day except on Saturdays and Sundays, and Wednesdays when the House rose early. As a rule, too, he did not get home until after midnight. It was hard on Susy, Kelmarsh admitted that candidly, and during his work in Parliament thought often of the lonely little wife at Brixton, which seemed a world away. But Susy was very plucky. There was so much to do in the little home at first. She was quite happy during the early weeks of her married life, making little window curtains with beautiful silk sashes, and pillow-cases, and afternoon tea-cloths, and antimacassars, and the thousand and one things which in her opinion made Acacia Villa "cosy."

It is true that sometimes the loneliness *was* rather appalling, though she never admitted it to Dick, and that sometimes while waiting for him to come home at night every minute seemed an hour and every hour a week, until she could have shrieked at the deliberate ticking of the kitchen clock. Sometimes her needlework would drop from her hands, and she would sit staring before her for quite a long time until her eyes were blinded by tears. But she did not give way. Often while the tears were wet upon her lashes she would jump up and sing, ever so merrily, old songs from musical comedies, and ballads taught her by "the boys." But that was not without its danger, for the songs reminded her of the old days on tour, of adventures in provincial lodging-houses with "the crowd," of the good fun that went with many hardships. How strange to think that she had left all that behind, and that she was a married woman with domestic duties! She would never be a "butterfly girl" again, and hear the click-clack of her heels on hard boards, and the frou-frou of frilled petticoats. She would never smile again over the footlights at a blurred mass of figures with white shirt-fronts, or up to the "gods" with their whistlings and cat-calls. She would never wear pink fleshings nor fear a death of cold from icy draughts playing on a bare neck and arms. Richard hated her even to mention the old life. Yet she could not help yearning at times for the smell of the footlights and the grease-paint. It was almost like a craving for drink. Once even she crept upstairs and opened a bottom drawer where she kept

one of her stage petticoats, and the tights she had worn last year as "Ali Baba" in the "Forty Thieves." She pulled them out on to the bed, and suddenly going down on her knees, laid her face upon the things and sobbed.

She was ashamed of that foolishness, and did not tell Richard.

Kelmarsh himself was quietly happy. He agreed with Dunstan that marriage makes surprisingly little difference to a man's daily life. And the difference was all on the pleasant side. It was very pleasant to come home late at night, after a heavy day in the House, to find hot milk waiting for him on the stove and a little wife in bed upstairs. Sometimes she had dropped off to sleep and was breathing so quietly that he was loath to wake her even by his kisses. Once or twice he was surprised to find tears upon her cheek. But she always scolded him if he did not wake her, and her arms were quickly about his neck when he knelt beside her and spoke her name. At the week-ends, too, they were lovers who dreaded the coming of Monday. After an early washing-up they would often go on the tramcar to Croydon or Carshalton, or to other places where there were still some fields uncovered by bricks and mortar, and then they would have lunch at some tea-shop, or sometimes in old-fashioned inns, and the day would pass as pleasantly as a dream.

They were not without visitors either. Their old friends at the boarding-house in Guildford Street did not forget them. Miss Ringwood was the first to come, and she brought with her, to Kelmarsh's surprise, Mr. Henderson, the old scholar. Susy brought out her very finest tea-cloth, and her best tea-service, and Kelmarsh slipped round and bought a Madeira cake and some buns, which unfortunately proved to be a week old. But the visit was very pleasant. Miss Ringwood inspected the house from attic to cellar, and found everything, she said, like a palace of heart's desire. In the bedroom she kissed Susy on the forehead and cried a little.

"My dear," she said, "I have wasted my life. What would I not give to have even the memory of a little love-nest like this?" Then afterwards she whispered into

Susy's ear, and made her blush prodigiously. "My dear," she said, "I hope before long there will be a little love-bird chirruping in the nest."

Downstairs Mr. Henderson was giving Kelmarsh some details about his great scheme for the Co-ordination of Knowledge.

"I trust," he said, "I may live long enough to give it to the world. I think it may prove of priceless service to humanity." He alluded to his friendship for Miss Ringwood. "She is a charming lady," he said. "We play tiddleywinks together in the evening now, and I find it a great mental relief. May I recommend the game to you and your beautiful young wife?"

Mr. Vinnicombe came one day with Mrs. Birch the landlady, and this was also a pleasant afternoon, though unfortunately towards the end of it Mrs. Birch's oldest lodger had a rather heated dispute with Kelmarsh on the subject of the Licensing Bill, which he said was an iniquitous measure of confiscatory legislation.

Mrs. Birch herself was overcome with emotion at the sight of the kitchen, which she said was so clean that it made her heart ache. She alluded to her second husband, who had a weakness for crockery when he was unwell, and she said that Susy should thank her stars she hadn't married a commercial traveller, though she had heard that members of Parliament were unpaid, which seemed to her a monstrous thing, as a living wage was not only natural but necessary.

Eunice Johnston called the following Saturday afternoon. Kelmarsh happened to be out for a little while, walking off a headache over Tooting Common, but Susy, who was cooking a joint for next day's dinner, opened the door to her.

It was possible that Susy was annoyed at being discovered in her very shabbiest dress with a big blue overall. Her hair was also untidy, and this always puts a woman at a disadvantage. Eunice Johnston, on the contrary, was in a tailor-made coat and skirt, and unusually neat and smart in a quiet lady-like style. Perhaps the sense of contrast hurt Susy's sensibilities, but for some reason she was rather cool

to her visitor. She took her into the little drawing-room, however, and said in a somewhat frigid manner that Mr. Kelmarsh would not be long.

"What a dear little home you have got!" said Eunice Johnston, looking round the room.

"Do you think so?" said Susy, coldly. "It is rather uncentral, is it not?"

"And yet," said Eunice, with a slight smile, "I suppose that hardly matters to you very much? You have a good deal of home-work, I expect."

Susy flushed rather hotly. "I suppose you mean I am always busy with menial work. On the contrary, I have a good deal of time on my hands."

Eunice was silent for a moment. "I did not mean to be impertinent," she said gently. "I am glad you have time for reading and so on."

"Oh, I don't do much reading," said Susy. "Mr. Kelmarsh and I find pleasure in conversation."

"Oh, of course," said Eunice.

There was an awkward silence, which Susy did not seem inclined to break. Then Eunice Johnston said with a little smile—

"Have you read Mill 'On the Subjection of Women'? It is the very foundation of the claims for women's liberty."

"Oh, I don't believe in that nonsense," said Susy, quickly. "Women have no right to liberty, in my opinion."

"Oh, surely you don't mean that!" said Eunice. "Don't you believe in women having votes?"

"Good gracious, no," said Susy, laughing rather shrilly. "Why should they? Votes, indeed! Let them mind their homes and their babies."

"But supposing they have none?" said Eunice Johnston, smiling, and she added with a quick sigh, "I have neither."

"Oh, that is your fault," said Susy.

"Do you think so?"

Eunice flushed, and for a moment seemed as if she would be angry. But she restrained herself with an effort.

"I think these forward women ought to be whipped,"

said Susy, warming up. "It is perfectly immodest the way they carry on, pushing themselves into men's places and— and behaving like loose creatures. Why should they want to enter politics, I should like to know?"

"It is very simple," said Eunice. "They have a right to share in making the laws they have to obey. Why should women be ruled by men?"

"Because they can't rule themselves," said Susy. "They are all foolish and hysterical creatures. What do they know about making laws? They had much better make beds and puddings."

"A vote would not prevent them from doing that," said Eunice.

"Oh yes, it would," said Susy. "They would be voting all day long."

Eunice laughed. "That would be impossible. They would only be asked to vote once in three years or so. Men are not prevented from doing their work if they take a reasonable interest in politics."

"Perhaps you would like to see women members of Parliament," said Susy, scornfully.

"Certainly," said Eunice. "Why not? Their brains are just as good as men's."

"And women Prime Ministers?" said Susy.

"I see no reason against it," said Eunice. "England was governed very well by a woman sovereign."

"The whole thing is wicked and absurd," cried Susy, angrily. "Women's brains are *not* equal to men's. Are my brains as good as Richard's? I defy you to say so!"

Eunice Johnston looked at Susy with a faint smile. "And yet your husband believes strongly in women's suffrage," she said. "Does not that convince you? Surely Mr. Kelmarsh has talked to you on the subject. He has it so much at heart."

For some reason Susy was stung by these words, and went very white with anger.

"My husband knows I disagree with him utterly on that question," she said.

Eunice Johnston began to feel rather uncomfortable. Although she held the reins of her temper well in hand,

it seemed that Susy was determined to force a quarrel. Fortunately, Kelmarsh came in at that moment, and he showed the liveliest pleasure at seeing Eunice again.

"This is a delightful surprise!" he cried, and he held her hand rather long, and said more than once, "I am so glad you have come, Eunice."

It was the first time he had called her by her Christian name, but as a married man it seemed to him permissible and pleasant. He did not see the sudden look of surprise on his wife's face, followed by an expression of deep annoyance.

Excited delightfully by the visit, he rattled on in a lively way to Eunice, and through sheer absent-mindedness allowed his wife to get tea without assistance. Susy did so very quietly, and took rather a long time about it, for in the scullery she had to stop to sponge her eyes, which would have shown traces of scalding tears. While serving tea she forced herself to be polite, and asked with apparent amiability whether Miss Johnston took sugar and milk, and if she would prefer brown bread to white. But Kelmarsh monopolized the conversation, and told Eunice of many little incidents of his work in the House which were new to Susy. She thought bitterly that Richard had not troubled to tell his own wife.

Then Eunice revealed the main object of her visit. It seemed that she had been deputed by the Women's Social and Political Union to ask Kelmarsh whether he would address a great meeting at the Albert Hall, and move the main resolution calling upon the Government to fulfil their pledges to grant the suffrage to women.

Kelmarsh was about to accept readily when Susy surprised him by saying, rather petulantly—

"I hope you won't be so foolish, Dick."

Kelmarsh laughed. "My dear child, of course I shall go. It is a great honour and a great opportunity."

"But supposing I ask you not to go?" said Susy.

"Oh, you won't ask me," said Kelmarsh, patting her hand. "There is no reason why you should."

Susy withdrew her hand quickly. "There is every reason," she said. "In the first place, I don't want you

to make a fool of yourself before a pack of silly women, and in the second place you promised to take me over to the Dunstans' on Wednesday night. Surely you respect a previous engagement?"

Kelmarsh looked at his wife with an uneasy sense of surprise. Susy had never spoken like this before. It was a pity she behaved so petulantly and rudely before Eunice. He knitted his brows for a moment.

"I am sorry about the Dunstans," he said. "But we can easily go to them another night. Anyhow, I shall only be too pleased to speak at the Albert Hall."

"Very well," said Susy.

She cleared away the tea-things rather noisily, and went to wash them up in the scullery while Kelmarsh again talked politics with Eunice. She sang to herself, as though she were in an exceptionally good temper, but Kelmarsh detected a rather shrill note in her rendering of "Hey, diddle, diddle," and "Little Boy Blue." It made him uneasy, and he was glad when Eunice got up and said good-bye.

Susy showed her out with icy politeness. "I am sorry my domestic duties have deprived me of your conversation," she said.

"I ought to have helped you," said Eunice, with sudden contrition. "But your husband was so interesting."

"I preferred to do it alone, thank you," said Susy; "and I am glad Dick interested you. You have such similar ideas, have you not?"

She shut the door rather hurriedly, and then going back into the parlour leant against the door-post, and to Richard's dismay burst into a passion of tears.

"Susy!" he cried. "What on earth is the matter?"

He sprang towards her and put his arms about her neck. But she shook him off with real anger.

"Leave me alone!" she cried, still sobbing bitterly. "If you loved me, you wouldn't treat me like you do."

"Good gracious!" said Kelmarsh. "What have I done?"

"How I hate that cat of a woman!" sobbed Susy.

Kelmarsh tried to laugh her out of her ill-temper, but

Susy was not to be pacified. She vowed that she would never kiss him again if he went to that vile meeting.

It was the cause of their first quarrel. Kelmarsh would not give up the meeting, and he was really annoyed with his wife for her rather hysterical behaviour. It seemed to him that the time had come to show the strength of his will-power with this petulant child whom he loved so much. He decided therefore not to press for the kisses which Susy withheld if he did not cancel his acceptance to speak at the meeting. It was certainly a good policy, for, after an hour's argument, and many tears from Susy, she put her arms round his neck and pressing her wet face against his kissed him a hundred times. But it had been a passionate little scene, and the first quarrel in married life is a painful precedent.

XXIX

KELMARSH did not tell Basil Chilvers about his marriage. Friendly as they were at the House, it was not the close friendship between men moving in the same social circle, and indeed the smoking-room of the House of Commons is not a place where private affairs are much discussed. Chilvers also was something of a mystery to him. In spite of an apparent candour he had a reserve behind which he veiled his inmost thoughts and any ambitions he may have had. Kelmarsh, who was equally reserved by nature, was not the first to be communicative regarding his private life, so that the two men met each other constantly without becoming intimate. Yet Chilvers did not lose his friendly interest in the young Labour member, and he was amused to notice the gradual broadening of the man's mind under its new influences, the toning down of his most violent prejudices, the gradual tendency in him towards toleration, and the casting off of

some of the crude revolutionary doctrines with which he had first come to the House—an evolution of which Kelmarsh himself was almost, if not quite, unconscious. He reminded Kelmarsh casually one day that he had promised to take tea one Wednesday afternoon with Lord Cossington's daughter. "Ursula asks me to tell you that Mrs. Denton will be there to-morrow, and they would both be pleased to see you."

Kelmarsh was not ready with an excuse. Secretly also he could not help feeling pleased that Ursula Chilvers should remember him and send this message. He had often thought of the evening at her house, and of her spiritual, rather haunting, beauty. He thanked Heaven he was not a snob, but certainly heredity could not be denied, and other things being equal it was agreeable to meet a girl who was a lady to the finger-tips, and who seemed, in the very poise of her head and in the curve of her lips, to have the unconscious pride of birth. So Kelmarsh thought, though he would have been ashamed to own as much to Chilvers. Anyhow, he would go, if only for the pleasure of meeting Ursula's aunt, Mrs. Denton, who was the most eloquent leader of women's suffrage. The white-haired lady, who had taken the chair at the Caxton Hall when he had first spoken for the cause, had been at other meetings where he had been asked to speak, and she always gave him a gracious smile. She had the Chilvers smile. It was curious how that was a characteristic of Basil Chilvers and Ursula, and old Lord Cossington, and some of the family portraits in Basil's rooms. It was a peculiar curve of the lips, and an expression in the eyes, which gave a look of singular sweetness to the face.

Kelmarsh did not tell Susy he was going. The truth was that Susy was beginning to be rather fretful of his long absences. It was unreasonable of her, because really he made every effort to be at home as much as possible. But he could not sacrifice his career to tie himself to a wife's apron-strings—much as he loved little Susy—and an occasional adventure into a higher social circle than that of the Ephra Road, Brixton, was essential for his

all-round education. He did not want to be a man of narrow ideas and experience. He must get to know life in many different phases; and, after all, Susy, as the wife of a public man, must learn to be a little patient, a little more sensible. He had taken to a black coat and grey trousers—a change from his old blue serge that perhaps symbolized a mental change. It was a morning-suit bought out of his first earnings for some designs of book covers, for a firm to which he had been introduced by Basil Chilvers, a very acceptable increase of the small salary allowed by his Burslem constituents. He noticed its effect on the episcopal-looking person who opened the door to him when he rang the bell at Belgrave Square. The elderly flunkey was quite deferential.

Ursula was *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Denton over a little tea-table. She was in a white gown with many little flounces, and with her brown hair loosely looped in a simple way and her slim white arms bare to the elbow. She seemed to Kelmarsh like an early Victorian young lady. She rose with a little exclamation of pleasure and surprise as he was shown in, and came forward with that quiet grace of movement which he had watched on the evening he had spent at her house.

"Thank you for coming," she said simply, and led him by the hand to Mrs. Denton. "You know my aunt already. She does not tire of praising you."

"There are so few young men," said Mrs. Denton, "who have the courage to take our side."

"Your side," said Ursula Chilvers, smiling.

"It is your side too, my dear," said Mrs. Denton. "I believe too much in your good sense to believe that you are against your sex. It is your good old-fashioned father and that dear, absurd creature Basil who hold you back."

"Oh, Basil!" said Ursula, smiling. "He has no influence with me, I assure you. He takes nothing seriously, and least of all himself."

She turned to Kelmarsh. "I do wish you would put some little enthusiasm into my cousin," she said. "He is wasting his life, and he has such brilliant talents, if he would only use them."

"We quarrel on every conceivable subject," said Kelmarsh. "I appeal to his sense of the ridiculous."

"Oh no," said Ursula. "He has a high opinion of you. He disagrees with you, of course. That is only natural."

"Why?" said Kelmarsh.

Ursula coloured a little. The question was too direct. But she faced it frankly.

"For one thing he is a Catholic—though I am sorry to say not a very serious one, and he has been brought up in Conservative tradition. I am glad of that, of course; but I do so want him to stand out as a man of convictions and high purpose. One of these days he will have my father's name. I should not like him to let it be forgotten."

"Good Heavens alive, child!" said Mrs. Denton, "do try and forget your mouldy old ancestors! I am not proud of them, I can assure you."

"Shame on you, aunt!" said Ursula, tapping the old lady's hand. "You shan't have any sugar in your next cup of tea."

"With so much bad blood in my veins," said Mrs. Denton, "it's a wonder to me I'm such a respectable old woman. Thank God, I'm trying to undo some of the cruelty my ancestors inflicted on unhappy women."

"I am afraid I shall quarrel with you, aunt, if you talk like that."

Ursula sat up very straight and looked at her aunt with such severity that Kelmarsh began to wonder whether there was to be a family quarrel over the tea-table. But Mrs. Denton did not pursue the subject.

"My beautiful Saint Ursula," she said. "I shall never cure you of your mediævalism. I am sure that when every woman has a vote you will never use it."

"Don't you be too sure," said Ursula. "I do not crave for women's suffrage, but if it comes, I shall at least try to counteract its bad effects. It will never do for Catholic women to leave all the power in the hands of their free-thinking sisters, who wish to alter the marriage laws and do away with religion."

"Do away with fiddlesticks!" said Mrs. Denton,

scornfully. "The real danger will be in the votes being swayed by clerical influence. The curates in country towns will decide the politics of every unmarried girl in their congregation—until we educate them."

"I am glad you added that saving clause," said Ursula, laughing. "It is a most powerful argument against your movement."

"Oh, you can't reform society by a stroke of the pen!" said Mrs. Denton. "We are fighting for a principle. Don't think we fail to realize the difficulties of putting it into practice."

"Men need educating just as much," said Kelmarsh. "The man in the street, who only reads the betting news and spends half his earnings in drink, is not a born legislator."

"Oh dear!" said Ursula Chilvers. "My head aches at all these problems. They are too big for my little brain. I shall be glad to get back to Bower Newton with my dear old village women and my father's labourers and their chubby babies. . . . Life is simple there, and I can understand it. If a man needs work, there is plenty for him to do. If he is ill and cannot work, my father is not unkind. When the women are taken bad I sit by them and try to cure their pain a little. And there are always nice new-born babies to nurse . . . one's duty is so plain and straightforward. Here, in London, everything is on so vast a scale—poverty and suffering—one can only shudder at it and ask big questions."

Kelmarsh was moved by the girl's simple tenderness, by the exquisite modulation of her voice, and by the wistfulness of her grey eyes. Her simplicity, her naturalness, were extraordinarily attractive.

She brought over an album and opened it on her lap, telling Kelmarsh to bring his stool closer and look at the photographs she had taken of her father's old manor-house and of the village below, and of the little rural scenes in which she had spent most of her life.

Kelmarsh sat close to her, and sometimes as she bent over the book, her brown hair almost touched his face, and the fragrance of her hair was like a sweet incense.

She showed him the picture of the Catholic chapel in the village.

"It has never been used for a Protestant service," she said, "not even during the Reformation times. The Chilverses were too much loved, and their people sheltered them from the pursuivants, and never turned. We are proud of that." Then she pointed to the portrait of an old priest. "That is Father Fletcher—a dear old man."

She showed Kelmarsh snapshots of the village high street, with its little stone houses with mullioned windows, and of cottages thatched almost to the ground, and of old timbered farmhouses, and charming bits of woodland, and rustic scenery. Her voice softened as she spoke of the old places, and of the beauty spots she loved so well, and of the house where she had been born, and where the Chilverses had lived for four centuries and a half, and before that in an older house on the same soil.

Kelmarsh, though he was fired with the spirit of modernity, was moved by the girl's enthusiasm for the memories of mediævalism, and by her little touches of description which brought vividly to his eyes the pictures of the quiet village in the heart of the Southlands.

He confessed that he had known nothing of the country and nothing of the south except London and its suburbs.

"Oh!" said Ursula. "You must come to see our village. It is so quiet, so peaceful. It would be like a little paradise to you after this world of bricks."

"Yes," said Kelmarsh; "it would do me good, I am sure. I sometimes pine to get away from the great cities to the peace of the country-side. It would be a new experience."

They talked together until Mrs. Denton, who had been reading a book, rose, and said she must be going.

"I can sometimes envy you, Ursula," she said. "You are a child of innocence. I, alas! have seen too much sin."

"It has not tainted your dear, good heart," said Ursula, kissing her forehead.

Kelmarsh escorted Mrs. Denton as far as Victoria, and

the old lady talked to him candidly about Ursula, as though he were a friend of the family.

"The child wants a lover," she said. "She is too spiritual. There is a wistfulness in her eyes which means that she is waiting for her knight to come riding down the dusty road of life, though she does not guess that she is looking for him. Sometimes I wish Basil Chilvers would ask her to marry him. Sometimes I think he will. But he is too lazy even to love, and not nearly serious enough to love passionately. That young man annoys me abominably. I could strike him when he smiles and smiles . . . though I own it is a delightful smile."

When Kelmarsh got home he found Susy in a fretful temper. Though it was late in the afternoon her hair was in curl-papers, and she was in an old blue dressing-gown. In the kitchen, the dinner things were still unwashed, and she had been lying on the bed with a bad headache, she said, reading the *feuilleton* in a halfpenny paper.

Kelmarsh coming from Ursula's drawing-room, so elegant, and so spotless, to this untidy little house at Brixton, and contrasting the girl in the white dress, and the brown hair loosely looped, like a beautiful princess in a picture-book, with his slovenly little wife with the touzled hair and flushed, fretful face, felt a curious shock of disappointment and displeasure. When Susy asked why he was so late on a Wednesday afternoon, and why he looked so straight down his nose when he did come in, he said rather sharply—

"You might at least have made yourself decent, and tidied up a little before my coming. The place is like a pigsty . . . and I wish to heaven you would take those rags out of your hair."

Susy went very pale, and sat up straight in her chair. "How dare you speak like that to me?" she said. Then clenching her teeth, she said again, in a voice choking with anger, "How dare you?"

Kelmarsh was disconcerted. He had never seen Susy look so angry.

"My dear child," he said, "don't let us have another quarrel. We have had too many lately."

"Whose fault is that?" said Susy. She rose and went to the fireplace, tapping her foot on the fender. "Oh, you get on my nerves with your continual fault-finding. You treat me like a naughty child."

Kelmarsh went close to her and put his arm round her waist.

"Susy!" he said, reproachfully. "Susy, my little wife!"

"Take your arms away," said Susy, with closed teeth.

Kelmarsh's arms dropped to his side, and he stood silent and moody.

"You think a kiss makes everything right," said Susy. "It doesn't; I want a little more sympathy—a little more companionship. . . . Oh, Dick!"—her voice suddenly broke, and putting her forehead down on the mantelpiece she burst into tears. "You leave me too much alone. . . . I can't bear it!"

Kelmarsh soothed her, and she flung her arms round his neck, crying on his shoulder. Then he spoke to her seriously, trying to make her see his position and his point of view. He could not resign his seat in Parliament. It would be dishonourable. It would break his whole career. And therefore she must resign herself to his long absences. She must take a pride in being the wife of a public man.

"I can't," sobbed Susy. "I want you for myself! Hang the public! They're all a pack of fools!"

She must try to take an interest in his work and ideas. If only she would read, and go on with her education. They could talk over the books together, and discuss the problems of the day, and the debates in Parliament.

"Parliament!" said Susy, thumping a cushion violently. "I wish it were at the bottom of the deep blue sea. What good does it do, I should like to know? They talk and talk and talk, and nobody except conceited politicians care a jot for their words. It makes the world no wiser or better."

Kelmarsh gave a simple explanation of the British Constitution, and in the middle of it Susy yawned prodigiously.

XXX

AS the weeks passed, Kelmarsh did not fail to notice that a change had come over Susy. She was no longer the high-spirited girl whose laughter and ringing voice had given a gaiety to the Bloomsbury boarding-house, and had made a little paradise of the Brixton villa during their first months of married life. She became listless, depressed, irritable, and no longer seemed to find any pleasure in her house-work. She lay in bed late in the mornings, pleading that she was tired and headachy, and though Kelmarsh came home late from the House, he had to get up first to light the fire and prepare breakfast.

She seemed to be possessed with a new desire for society, and while her husband was away she would leave plates and dishes unwashed and go up to town to call on Mrs. Birch and Em'ly, or to see some of her actress friends in lodgings in the Blackfriars and Waterloo Road.

Perhaps it was this return to her old associations that filled Susy Kelmarsh with a new restlessness, and a yearning to get back to the footlights. She spoke to her husband about it one evening. She had been more like her old self, and for the first time for some weeks now Kelmarsh had been pleased to hear her singing about the house. Then she sat down at the cottage piano, and while Richard was reading the Parliamentary Report in *The Times* she rattled off the score of "Tom Jones." Suddenly she stopped in the middle of a bar and twisting round on her music-stool said—

"Dick, I want to ask you a question?"

"Ask away," said Kelmarsh, without looking up from his paper.

She came over to him and pulled the paper away.

"Dick," she said, "it is rather a serious question."

He looked up and saw that she was pale and had excited eyes.

"What is it?" he said. "Do you want some more house-keeping money? You haven't been so careful

lately, Susy. We shall have to pull up a bit or I shall get into trouble."

"It isn't that," she said. "Not exactly, though it would put something into the pot." She hesitated, and then, taking her courage in both hands, said a little breathlessly, "What would you say to my going back to the stage? I have a chance of an engagement."

Richard dropped his paper, and said rather sharply, "Nonsense, Susy. I can't hear of such a thing."

"You must hear of it," said Susy, in a low voice. "I have been thinking over it a lot. Phil Darlington first put the idea in my head, and I can't get it out again."

"Phil Darlington?" said Kelmarsh, flushing uneasily. "Have you seen him lately? You didn't tell me."

"I have had tea with him once or twice," said Susy, with just a trace of nervousness. "And I went to a *matinée* with him last Wednesday."

"It's the first I've heard of it," said Kelmarsh. "Why didn't you tell me before?"

There was a note of anger in his voice, and his mouth hardened.

"You don't always tell me when you see that Eunice Johnston girl," said Susy, sharply. "It was Mrs. Birch who told me about your meetings with her."

Kelmarsh was silent for a moment. It was true that he had not told Susy. He ought to have done. But the very name of Eunice Johnston made Susy angry for some reason. And now he never mentioned her if possible.

"Eunice Johnston is not Phil Darlington," he said illogically, but very emphatically. "You know I dislike him intensely. He is a dangerous man."

"You don't dislike him more than I hate that Johnston woman," said Susy, bitterly.

"If Darlington puts any silly ideas into your head," said Kelmarsh, "I will have something to say to him."

"Oh, indeed!" said Susy.

Kelmarsh picked up his paper and began to read *again*. These continual bickerings were very distressful. Susy

watched him with big wistful eyes into which two tears welled slowly. Then suddenly she sank down on her knees and put her arms round his waist.

"Dick," she said in a broken voice, "don't be hard with me. I want you to let me take an engagement. I can't bear this humdrum life, this awful loneliness. I shall go mad if I don't get some work to do."

She spoke the last sentence in rather a shrill voice, and pressed the palms of her hands to her head.

Kelmarsh got up irritably, and his mouth was still hard,—"You complain of having no work to do," he said. "Why don't you attend to your household duties? This place is a disgrace. The kitchen is always like a pigsty. I wanted to ask my mother to stay with us, but I should be ashamed for her to see such untidiness and dirt. I could see that even Mrs. Dunstan was shocked when she came last week. There is heaps of work to do if you would only do it."

Susy flared out at him. "You want to make a drudge of me," she said. "You think I'm beneath you in intellect and education, and only fit to be a servant."

"I think you ought to be a good wife," said Kelmarsh, severely. "I can't understand you, Susy. You are not a bit like you used to be."

"It is you who have changed," said Susy, bitterly. "You used to love me once. Now, you despise me." There was a sob in her voice, but she did not break down and cry. She only stared before her with hard eyes.

Kelmarsh was angry, very angry. These hysterical scenes of Susy's—they had been too frequent lately—jangled his nerves. He had been too patient with the child.

"Look here, Susy," he said sternly. "Don't let me have any more of this nonsense. I am tired of it. Learn to control your emotions. Remember you are no longer a child, but the wife of a Member of Parliament. Have you no interest in my career, no respect for my principles—my prejudices, if you like to call them so? I absolutely forbid you to entertain the idea of going back to the stage. I loathe and detest the whole atmosphere of the

theatre. It is degrading and immoral. I rescued you from it to make you my wife."

"Rescued me!" cried Susy, her eyes blazing with anger and her voice shrill and harsh. "Rescued me! . . ." She laughed hysterically, and, then restraining herself, said in a low, passionate voice: "You talk to me as if I had been a low woman, as if you had taken me from the streets. . . . Oh, you cad! You prig!"

Kelmarsh put on his hat and went for a walk. He was more angry, more distressed than ever he had been in his life. What could he do with Susy? What could he do with her? Was she going to spoil his whole life? Was she gradually going to develop into a fretful, nagging woman who would never give him any peace? If only he could educate her! If she would only read and learn. But she would not; she giped at him as a schoolmaster when he tried to teach her. She would only read cheap, trashy fiction. She ridiculed every ideal he held most dear. She hated his political principles; she was utterly uninterested in his work and career. What on earth could he do with her?

As he walked, his heart became leaden, and he gave way to pessimistic thoughts. Perhaps he ought never to have married her. Perhaps he had been a fool, cruel to her and cruel to himself. For a moment Eunice Johnston's face seemed to stare out of the darkness at him with her serious, wistful eyes. And then the ghost face faded, and in its place there was another. It was the face of Ursula Chilvers, white and shining with saint-like purity, with tender, haunting eyes. She seemed to smile at him, and the vision was so real that Kelmarsh stopped suddenly as he walked across Streatham Common and called out, "My God!" in a startled voice. Then he went back home and found that Susy had gone to bed. He went up an hour later, and when he bent down to kiss her as she lay sleeping, her face was wet again with tears.

XXXI

FOR some weeks Susy seemed in a quieter mood, and Kelmarsh congratulated himself on having spoken firmly to her, and put a stop to her hysteria. She was more tidy in the house too, and his sensibilities were not shocked by coming home to find a litter of dirty plates in the kitchen, and dust thick on the sideboard in the parlour. He sometimes wished, however, that she would not be quite so quiet, and once he realized with a swift pang that she had not kissed him for two whole days. But he was too busy just now to give much thought to his domestic life. The session was coming to the end in the House, and he was absorbed in committee and lobby work, and in following an exciting series of debates. He had also booked himself for many meetings on women's suffrage, and this movement was making more and more claims upon his time. He was now fully recognized as one of the leaders, and every morning's post brought him a great mass of correspondence which taxed him severely. He was sometimes tempted to withdraw from some of the engagements thrust upon him, but Eunice Johnston, whom he met frequently on public platforms, kept up the fire of his enthusiasm, and Mrs. Denton, the aunt of Ursula Chilvers, and the President of the Women's Freedom League, was constantly enlisting his support in her campaign. He could not help realizing that his career was linked to the cause of women's suffrage. It was in this direction rather than in the House that his public reputation was increasing in influence. Socially, too, it was a help to him. He came in touch with many distinguished women of all professions, many charming and delightful women of high culture, and broad minds and strong practical ability. They were eager to be introduced to him, and it was pleasant and flattering to find that his words had weight with them, and that they sought and acted upon his advice. Undoubtedly, this social influence was working subtly upon his character. He was conscious of a widening of his mental horizon, of a new and less

prejudiced outlook upon life. He was even aware—and he smiled at the thought of his old abruptness and awkwardness—of an improvement in his manners.

But all this left Susy too much alone. He was sorry for that—very sorry; and sometimes his heart smote him at the thought of her loneliness.

Perhaps he would have had more pity if he had seen inside that troubled little heart more clearly, if he had taken more trouble to understand her temperament.

Susy, indeed, was passing through a period of dark despair, and the pity of it was that she could not throw herself in Richard's arms and tell him everything. He was too severe, too much of the schoolmaster. She wanted her lover again.

She abased herself at the thought of her own ignorance. If only she had been well educated so that she could be on his intellectual level. Often she took up the books which he had advised her to read, but they were too difficult, the words seemed blank and meaningless, and she could not concentrate her attention sufficiently. Her temper, too, was getting out of control. Often she would promise herself to be smiling and bright when he came, as she used to be in the old days. Sometimes she had dressed in her best clothes, so that she should be pretty and attract his eyes. But he was so long in coming! As the clock ticked out and the hands went slowly round, so slowly, hour after hour, all her irritability returned, all her affection seemed to ooze away, so that at last, when she heard his latch-key in the door, she was highly strung, and sharp things seemed to slip from her tongue.

She felt the need of something outside herself, some supernatural strength to sustain her in this time of trouble. Several times she flung herself on her knees and tried to pray. But she had never been taught any prayers, and she could not imagine how to speak to God, if there were any God. She found herself talking slang to Him, and abusing Him, or simply moaning out inarticulate cries which frightened the black cat, who was now her only companion in the house. Yet she felt the need of religion, more and more she needed it. One day, she slipped into

a Catholic church in the Brixton road, a tall, red building. She was half frightened when she found herself inside among a little group of women kneeling at the altar, before which flickered a little red light. She knelt also and stared about her at the statue of a woman and child, at a monk in a brown habit, with bare feet, holding another child in his arms, at the pictures on the wall, showing Christ carrying the Cross, and being scourged and crucified. A faint smell of incense stole into her nostrils with a sweet fragrance, and it seemed to stir her senses in a subtle way, causing the tears to blind her eyes.

There was no service going on. The women prayed silently, self-absorbed. She herself did not know how to pray. She wished she could. It might help her a lot.

Yet when she came out of the church she felt comforted a little, so comforted that she went every afternoon to the same place for a few minutes until it became familiar to her.

She spoke to Richard one night about religion. "I believe it would do me good to go to church," she said. "I think I must have been a Catholic when I was a child. All the Irish are. What would you say if I went in for it again, just to see how it works?"

Kelmarsh did not encourage her. He had strong views about religion, though not quite such violent opinions as in the old days. He remembered that Chilvers was a Catholic—though he did not suppose he took it seriously. And Ursula Chilvers—she was very loyal to the "old faith," as she called it. Still, it was all humbug, founded upon old superstitions.

"It may be good for some natures," he said to Susy. "But I would rather you kept away from it. You are quite emotional enough already, aren't you, little wife?"

She pursed up her lips and did not continue the subject, nor did she tell him that she was in the habit of spending a few minutes every day in the red church on the hill.

There were other things she did not tell her husband, who came home too late and too tired for anything but

supper and bed, and who in the morning was always busy with his papers and letters.

She did not tell him, for instance, that Darlington, who was out of an engagement, dropped in quite frequently in an evening, and stayed until about ten o'clock, talking in his cheery way. Sometimes her conscience pricked her. She really ought to tell Dick. But she knew how he detested Phil. He had said so every time she had mentioned his name. And she was afraid that if she told him of these visits he would get angry and put a stop to them. He had no right to do that. There was nothing wrong in them, and they comforted her wonderfully.

Darlington was so kind. He understood her loneliness, though only once or twice he said hard things about Dick, which she stopped with a quick word of reproof. But he told the most amusing anecdotes of theatrical life, making her laugh, as she had not laughed for a long time, and recalling memories of old adventures when they had been on tour together. She gave him bread-and-cheese suppers, clearing them away before Dick came in, not without an uncomfortable sense of guilt—though there was nothing wrong in it. Nothing wrong whatever; and Darlington was very considerate. He did not even smoke.

"It is no use making trouble with your husband," he said.

He used to sit whistling and humming while she played waltz tunes on the cottage piano. Once, while she was playing, he got up and crossed the room towards her, and then suddenly bent down and kissed her on the neck.

She sprang up with a little cry of anger. "If you ever do that again, Phil," she said, "I will never let you come into the house."

He apologized at once. "I didn't mean it," he said humbly. "It was a sudden impulse. I won't do it again, honour bright."

She forgave him, and he was true to his word. He never tried to kiss her again, though sometimes he would

take her hand as they sat together over the fire, holding it in his, and stroking it.

One night, he said that Simonetti had been asking after her. The ballet master missed his best dancer. He was arranging to take "The Butterfly Girl" round the provinces, and would be glad to take her on at an increased salary.

"Why don't you?" said Darlington. "It would be a change for you, and it is only a short run. Kelmarsh ought not to mind. Why the dickens should he?"

"But he does," said Susy, sighing. "He won't listen to a word about my going back."

She got up on her knees before the fireplace where she had been sitting.

"Oh, Phil!" she said. "I would give my head to go." She put her hands to her hair, and, thrusting it back, stared into the fire. "Just to smell the flare of the footlights again!" she said in a low voice. "Just to hear the old tap of the baton, and to go scudding on to the boards with a swish of skirts! To hear the gallery boys whistling through their fingers, and the sound of clapping." Her face got hot. "Oh! oh!" she said, "the sound of clapping! The whispers of the girls in the wings! The laughter in the dressing-rooms! The old jokes and slang!" She turned round and put her hand on Darlington's knee. "Phil!" she said. "Phil! Don't tempt me!"

He laughed at her, and said he didn't want to play the part of Mephistopheles. It didn't suit his make-up. But all the same it was a good offer, and he couldn't for the life of him see why Kelmarsh should object. He was always away from home, and pretty hard up, it seemed. The money would be to his advantage, and before he began to miss her she would be back again.

Darlington himself was going out again with the "Jolly Jack" company. They would meet in some of the towns. It would be very jolly. Just like the old days.

Susy laughed excitedly, but every now and then she said: "No, no, it can't be! Dick would never hear of it."

Darlington left the subject to talk of other things, and she went to the kitchen and toasted some cheese. Then they laid the table together, and had a merry little meal, laughing like two children. Afterwards they washed up and Darlington broke a plate; and then they laughed again, laughing until their sides ached, though there was really no reason for their mirth.

Then they went back to the parlour, and Susy made up the fire, and it was so cosy and warm that Darlington was loath to turn out, though the hour was late.

Susy sat on the hearth-rug, and presently she felt sleepy, and her head nodded until it fell back on Darlington's knee. He caressed her hair lightly with his hand, and his clean-shaven mouth smiled a little whimsically. How pleasant it was to have Susy's little head on his knees, and smell the fragrance of her hair, and to see her breast heaving ever so gently as she slept. And how warm it was and comfortable by the fire, while outside the rain was beating, and the wind whistling down the Ephra Road! Presently Darlington himself began to nod, and his head sank upon his chest. Once or twice he stirred and tried to keep awake, but he was afraid of disturbing Susy; she was so sweet like this—and he fell asleep.

XXXII

AN hour later, Kelmarsh opened the door with his latch-key. The gas was burning dimly in the hall, and he guessed that Susy had gone to bed. He would be very quiet. It was a shame to wake her. But he hoped she had left some hot milk for him on the little hob in the parlour. It was a beast of a night!

He took off his wet coat and hat, and hung them up quietly. Then he went on tip-toe to the parlour.

He approached the fireplace and then stood still, sud-

denly, as though turned to stone. His face went ashen, and there was a look of passion and horror in his eyes.

Darlington was still asleep, with Susy's head snuggled on his knee. The man's hand lay limply across Susy's shoulder, and as he slept there was a little smile on his lips.

"My God!" said Kelmarsh, in a hoarse whisper, and then in a kind of blind fury he strode over to Darlington, and, seizing him by the collar, shook him so violently that the man's head wagged up and down horribly.

For a moment Darlington gurgled inarticulate words and stared wildly. Susy woke up with a start, and, getting on her knees, pushed back her hair from a dead white face with burning eyes. She seemed dazed, and then gave a frightened little cry as she saw her husband.

Kelmarsh let go of Darlington's collar. "What does this mean?" he said hoarsely. "What does it mean?"

Darlington looked for a moment as if he would fling himself upon Kelmarsh and do violence to him, but with an extraordinary effort he restrained himself, and, rearranging his collar, gave a cool little laugh.

"It means nothing," he said, "absolutely nothing. If you see any evil in it, you are a fool, Kelmarsh—a bigger fool than I take you for."

Kelmarsh put his hand to his lips, which were hot and dry.

"I find my wife sleeping with her head on your knee," he said in a strange voice. "Does that mean nothing?"

"Nothing," said Darlington. "The fire was warm and we fell asleep."

Susy stood up and would have gone over to Kelmarsh, but he waved her back.

"How often has this man been here?" he said. "Is this the first time?"

Susy hesitated, and a lie trembled on her lips.

But Kelmarsh saw her hesitation. "Don't lie to me," he said. "Tell me the truth. I want the truth."

"Phil has been here often before," said Susy. She was as white as her husband, and she held her head up proudly. "He has been here while you were away—night after night while you left me alone. But there has been nothing wrong between us, believe it or not, as you like."

"I do not believe it," said Kelmarsh, with a horrible cry like a shriek. "The man is a blackguard, a dirty blackguard!"

At these words Darlington strode forward and swung his fist up.

"I'll smash you," he said fiercely, "you foul-mouthed prig."

But Susy flung herself upon him, and held his arm. "Phil!" she said. "For my sake!"

Darlington gave a deep breath as though he were choking. Then he let his arm go limp, and thrust Susy away gently with the other.

"Look here, Kelmarsh," he said. "For your wife's sake, I won't hurt you, and for Susy's sake, I will say this: There has never been an evil thought between her and me. She has been absolutely loyal to you. If you don't believe that, you are an evil-minded cur."

He bent down and whispered a word to Susy. Then he went out of the room, took his hat and coat quietly, and went out of the front door, banging it behind him.

Susy was shivering as though she were very cold. She held the back of a chair and looked at her husband, who was standing in a moody way staring at the carpet.

"Richard," she said, "I hope you are not going to be absurd about this."

He looked up with a sudden blaze of anger. "Go to your room," he said. "I—I cannot talk to you to-night. I must think this thing out."

"What thing?" said Susy. Then, as he was silent again, in a white heat of passion, she struck the back of

the chair with her fist so that she bruised herself. "Oh, you fool!" she cried. "Are you going to imagine all sorts of false horrors?"

"Imagine," said Kelmarsh, sternly. He gave a grim little laugh. "You have confessed that that—black-guard has been here often. You have at least deceived me damnably. I hope it is not worse. How can I be sure?" He stared at the carpet again, and repeated his last words in a kind of whisper. "How can I be sure?"

Susy laughed, a shrill unpleasant laugh. "You can never be sure," she said, "unless you believe me."

He strode towards her, raising his hand as if he would strike her.

"Go to your room," he said, his voice trembling with anger. "You have deceived me. Perhaps I shall never believe you again."

Susy went white to the lips, and for a moment she swayed as if about to fall. But she threw back her head very proudly, very disdainfully, and went out of the room. Kelmarsh heard her go upstairs, and, shutting her door, turn the key in the lock. For half an hour he stood motionless, staring at the rose-pattern on the carpet as if he were hypnotized. Then he gave a sudden shiver, and sat down in the arm-chair, pulling it close to the fire, which had almost smouldered out. His face was very haggard, and his eyes heavy as the early morning light stole through the curtains into a room still lit by gas. Then towards seven o'clock he fell asleep and did not wake until the morning paper was thrust through the letter-box two hours later.

He got up and stretched his stiff limbs. All his passionate anger had burnt out, and his heart was as cold as the grey cinders in the grate, which he raked out before laying another fire. He lit a jet on the gas-stove in the scullery and boiled up a kettle. Then he made some tea, and carried a cup upstairs.

He rapped at the bedroom door. "Here is some tea, Susy," he said in an ordinary level tone, without emotion of any kind.

She did not answer for a moment. Then she said in a tired voice—

“Put it outside.”

“Won’t you open the door?” said Kelmarsh.

“Presently.”

He put the tea on the mat, and went downstairs again to wash in the scullery, and have his own breakfast. Long after Susy’s tea must have been stone cold, he heard her open the bedroom door softly and take it in. Then she locked the door again. At the sound of the sharp click his mouth hardened. So Susy was still in a bad temper! He had been inclined to go up to her. If she would have thrown her arms round his neck and begged his pardon tearfully for deceiving him about Darlington, he would have kissed her and forgiven. Perhaps he had been too hard last night—at the first shock of discovering his wife asleep with her head against Darlington’s knee. He winced, and drew a deep breath at the vision of it. But when Susy locked her door again it was a sign to him that she was still determined to lock him out of her heart also. And he was the offended party. He would not soften towards Susy as long as she was sullen.

He wrote letters for an hour, and then bundling all his papers in a despatch bag, put on his hat and coat. In the hall he called out “Good-bye, Susy!” He repeated the cry, and then he heard her answer, “Good-bye,” in a rather stifled voice. It seemed to him that she was crying. Poor little wife! He sighed heavily. Life was a difficult thing. Frightfully difficult. Was the game ever worth the candle?

He went out and banged the door as quietly as he could.

XXXIII

RICHARD left the House early in the afternoon. He pleaded a bad headache to Dunstan, and asked him to excuse his presence at a Committee.

"You do look rather queer, my boy," said Dunstan, with sympathy. "Have you been up all night? The wife is not ill, I hope."

Kelmarsh coloured and muttered something about her not being very well.

Dunstan looked at him curiously. "Any news?" he said quietly.

Kelmarsh smiled and shook his head. He went home on the car. He was determined to put things straight with Susy. This state of things was intolerable. It was wearing down his nerves. Why could not the poor girl be more reasonable? He was still very angry about Darlington, but he would make her promise not to see him again, and he would try to give her some new interests. He would let her have music lessons at the Guildhall. Perhaps he could induce her to do some social work among the poor women of the district.

When he opened the door of his little house in the Ephra Road, he did not hear her moving in the kitchen. He called out to her, but she did not answer. His face fell a little. She had evidently gone out to tea somewhere. He was disappointed at that. He had hoped to find her in a more melting mood, sorry for her naughtiness, and eager to have the affection he was ready to show at her first sign of contrition.

He went into the parlour and found that she had set out his supper-things. Then on one of the plates he saw a letter addressed to him in her round schoolgirl writing. He stared at it and went suddenly white, while something seemed to stab his heart. There was something terribly ominous in that white sealed envelope. What was inside it? Why did she write to him? He trembled violently, and a cold sweat broke out on his forehead. He was afraid to take up the letter and open it! Then he laughed

strangely. What a fool he was! It was only to say she had gone over to Mrs. Birch and would be back rather late.

He took up the letter and a table-knife, and sliced the back of the envelope. Then at a glance he saw it was a long letter—not a brief note—and at the sight of many pages scrawled over by the big letters with many blots and scratches, he was again filled with a great dread, and a faintness stole over him.

He sat down heavily and, spreading out his letter, put his elbows on the table with his hands to his head, and read what Susy had written to him.

“MY DEAR RICHARD,” (she said),

“I cannot stand this life any longer. I should either go mad or take to drink. For your sake as well as my own, I have decided to go away from you for awhile. One of these days I may come back—if you want me, and if you ever remember your old love for me. How can I explain? Oh, my God, how can I make you understand? You don’t understand, or you would not be so hard. Of course, you ought never to have married me. It was a mistake. I am too ignorant to be your wife, and too stupid, and too worldly. Perhaps that is not my fault. I was never educated, and I never had any religion, which makes a woman more ready to submit, and I have always lived among actors and actresses, who never talk seriously and never think. You are too serious; once I tried to teach you to laugh, and thought I had succeeded, but it was only for a little while. I have not heard you laugh for two months, and I can’t be cheerful all alone. It is a dismal thing to live with a man who never laughs.

“Oh, I have been very lonely. Sometimes while you have been away for hours and hours I have wanted to shriek—to shriek myself into a fit. I could have put up with that if you had given me your heart when you did come home. But you have not done so. You have treated me as a fretful child, not as a wife. You have revealed yourself to others—to Eunice Johnston—and shut

yourself up in your own brain, when you have been alone with me. You have not been patient with me. I believe I could have learnt some of the things you wanted to teach me if you had been more of a lover and less of a schoolmaster. But when you put down that upper lip of yours and began to preach and to scold, I hated it. I think the devil tempted me to jeer at you.

"Oh, I know I have been wicked and foolish! But it was not always on my side. You have not played the game with me. That woman—Eunice Johnston—why didn't you tell me about your meetings with her? Why were you so secret about your friendship with her? And if you could have a woman friend, why did you forbid me to see Phil Darlington, my one friend, who has been kind and good to me for years? You are a hypocrite. Yes, I must write that. How dare you speak on women's suffrage and the liberty of women when you do not allow any liberty to your own wife, when you make a slave of her? Women's liberty! Oh, my God! If you had any sincerity you would not have thwarted my wish to do the work for which I have been trained, the work I love so much. No, all women might have liberty except your wife. They were to free themselves from the 'old domestic tyranny'—isn't that what you call it?—but she was to stay at home alone, a drudge. All women were to have the right to satisfy their 'higher impulses' (oh yes, I have learnt some of the phrases), but she was to put the thought of her profession away as a thing of evil. 'Platonic friendship is the most beautiful thing in the world' (I have heard you say so a dozen times), but I may not talk with a man without being suspected of immorality. More than suspected—accused. Yes, you have accused me of being guilty. That has hurt me most. I don't think I can ever forget that—or the words you once said about having 'rescued' me. In your heart, I believe, you think I am a creature of vice, a fallen woman! Can I live with you when you have such thoughts? No. I cannot, I will not, though, God knows, I love you even now.

"Perhaps it will break my heart to leave you, and I

think you will suffer a little too, but it is better to have a broken heart than to go mad.

"I am going on tour for three months. (You needn't be afraid. Phil Darlington is not going with me.) Perhaps at the end of that time we may want each other again. If not, I will not trouble you.

"Susy."

Richard Kelnarsh read his wife's letter slowly to the end. He read it with hard eyes, breathing heavily, and as some of the sentences passed into his brain a tide of colour swept into his white face and then surged back, leaving it ashen grey. He left the letter lying on the table, and paced up and down the little room for hours almost like some wounded animal, now and again uttering strange inarticulate cries and beating his forehead with the palm of his hand. Hypocrite! she had called him hypocrite. The word stung him—stung him repeatedly to his very heart. And it was true. He had been a hard taskmaster while he was preaching the gospel of women's liberty. He made Susy too much of a drudge, while he was away speaking on public platforms, or discussing women's rights in the House of Commons' smoking-room. And she had hit him hard about Darlington. Certainly she had a right to his friendship—except that the man was a low cad. As for Eunice Johnston—well, perhaps he had been a little indiscreet, a little rash, in maintaining such an intimacy with another woman—purely intellectual as it was. And no doubt he had been wrong in preventing Susy from going back to the stage—though he loathed and hated the life. But now she had gone, without his leave. Susy had gone from him. He could not believe it. Susy had gone!

He undressed and went to bed, but could not sleep. The absolute silence of the house got upon his nerves. If only Susy lay beside him! He took her pillow and kissed it, bursting into tears, and crying like a child. He called her name, "Susy! Susy!" but there was no answer in the darkness of the night.

XXXIV

KELMARSH went to Dunstan's house next morning and told his bitter tale to the Labour member and his wife. He laid the blame upon himself, not upon Susy, and asked their advice.

Mr. and Mrs. Dunstan were astounded. They had always thought of Kelmarsh and Susy as a happy man and wife. But they saw that Kelmarsh was quite broken by the tragedy. There were great lines under his eyes, and he seemed utterly ill and dispirited. Mrs. Dunstan was very severe on Susy, pitying the young man. She could not understand such wickedness. To abandon a husband like that! It was abominable. Who would make his bed and cook his meals?

Dunstan silenced his wife. "My lad," he said to Kelmarsh, "I am very sorry for you, but I think you have been very much to blame. I quite agree with your wife. You have been fired with enthusiasm for the ideals of women's liberty, and you have been the last to practise what you preach. I hope it will be a lesson to you."

Kelmarsh accepted the rebuke silently, though he flushed under it.

"The question is, however," said Dunstan, "what is to be done? Can't you get her address?"

Kelmarsh shook his head. "The only man who would know it is Darlington, and I can't go to him."

"Why not?" said Dunstan.

Kelmarsh's lips tightened. "I prefer not to."

"Don't talk humbug, man," said Dunstan, irritably. "You've got to make amends for your stupidity. Put your pride in your pocket and go to the actor. He seems to me a very decent sort."

Kelmarsh was persuaded to do so. He called at the boarding-house in Bloomsbury and asked for Darlington, but Em'ly told him that "Mr. Phil" had gone on tour. He had started the day before.

This news filled Kelmarsh with a new dread. He had

a frightful suspicion that Darlington, in spite of what Susy said, was in the same company. The thought terrified him, and he looked so curious that Em'ly was alarmed.

"Good 'Eavins, Mr. Kelmarsh," she said, "what's come over you? You look like a spectre!"

Kelmarsh parried her inquiries, pleaded that he hadn't time to see Mrs. Birch, to whom he sent his compliments, and went to the House, where he took Dunstan aside and told him the additional news.

Dunstan was angry. "Look here," he said. "Have more faith in your wife's honesty. She said in her letter, so you told me, that Darlington was not going with her. I believe that absolutely. You have no right to disbelieve it."

"I do not believe in anything," said Kelmarsh, bitterly. "I have lost faith in myself, which is the worst scepticism."

"What you've got to do is to wait," said Dunstan. "Susy will write sooner or later. In the meantime, do your work and put yourself right with yourself."

It was a fortnight from the end of the session, and to Kelmarsh those two weeks were a long-drawn torture. He tried to forget things by hard and strenuous work, and did, to a certain extent, succeed. But all day long there lurked in his brain the question, "Has Susy written?" Every night he went home to his lonely little house, longing to find a letter on the door-mat addressed in Susy's childish writing. Every night as he put his latch-key in the door he thought, "At last she has written." But he was always disappointed. And as the days went by, Susy's continued silence chilled his heart, and he hardened towards her. It seemed to him that she had deserted him for ever, and he could not find in his soul the conviction that he had deserved such treatment. It was not womanly, nor kind. It made him believe that Susy had never really loved him. Underneath all her childishness there must be a hard nature.

At the House his haggard looks startled Basil Chilvers. "My dear chap," he said, "you want a holiday. You

have been working too hard. What are you going to do when the House rises?"

Kelmarsh hadn't the ghost of a notion. He supposed he would have to run up to Burslem to report to his constituents.

"Nonsense," said Chilvers. "You must take a rest first. You look horribly run down. What you want is country air. Get away from this beastly city."

Kelmarsh said he couldn't afford it. He must try and earn some money by doing more book-covers and increasing his connection.

Chilvers was thoughtful, and seemed to have some plan in his mind. A few days later he came to Kelmarsh, and said—

"Look here. I have got a little country cottage down at Bower Chilvers. I sometimes stay there instead of at the Manor House. It's an idyllic little nest with a thatched roof, and a garden full of old-fashioned, sweet-smelling flowers. It would be a favour if you could keep it warm for me. I'm off to Scotland for four weeks, when I shall go down there myself. Will you take it off my hands till then?"

"I'm afraid not," said Kelmarsh. "It's very kind of you, but——"

"I hate that word 'but,'" said Chilvers. "Really, you can give me no reason for a refusal. Now don't be proud and haughty. It will be a favour to me."

Kelmarsh refused for two days, and then accepted on the third. The truth was that the idea of staying at the lonely little house in the Ephra Road was intolerable, and there was a great longing in his heart to get away to the peace of the country, where he could cool his hot brain, and think out the problem of his life in quiet and peace.

Chilvers was delighted. "I have no doubt my uncle and Ursula will be rejoiced to have you up at the Manor House; but if you don't want their company you can plead literary work, or anything else you like. They won't worry you."

Kelmarsh had not thought of this. He was almost tempted to draw back. The neighbourhood of Lord

Cossington and his daughter would disturb his dream of solitude. But he could hardly explain that to Chilvers, and he thought of Ursula Chilvers and her album of photographs. Perhaps he might meet her once or twice, and avoid all society afterwards. He remembered her simplicity. No, she would not worry him.

Chilvers wrote in advance to his old woman who kept the cottage clean, and made arrangements for his friend's reception.

"I hope you will pick up strength there, Kelmarsh," he said, on the last day of the House, just before he was leaving for the North. "I don't like to see you looking so fagged. . . . If you see my cousin, give me a good character. Tell her I am becoming a serious and high-souled creature."

He smiled and shook hands warmly, cutting short the murmured thanks of Kelmarsh, who was touched by the man's real kindness and generosity.

Three days later, Kelmarsh locked the door of his house at Brixton, and put the latch-key in his pocket. He had given instructions at the post-office to have his letters forwarded, and he had packed up a few things in a small handbag. As he went away, he looked back at the little villa, and there surged into his heart a dreadful feeling of desolation. He remembered driving up here in a four-wheeled cab with Susy on the evening of their marriage-day. How sweet she had looked in her simple muslin dress! How she had laughed with joy as he put his arm round her to lead her into her new home! How beautiful had been their first meal when, as husband and wife, they sat close to each other at the little table, talking foolish tender things, too full of love to eat! And now he was leaving the place, alone. He did not even know where Susy was. She had deserted him—perhaps for ever.

A sudden mist blinded his eyes, and he stumbled forward with his bag, almost like a drunken man.

XXXV

TO those who have lived in a village, and know how difficult, how impossible even, it is to avoid meeting any one of its four or five hundred souls in the High Street, or at the bend of a lane, or face to face across a stile, it will seem strange that Richard Kelmarsh was a week in Bower Chilvers before he had to lift his hat to Lord Cossington and his daughter. The truth was that he took great care to keep out of their way. Always sensitive, and suffering now from a severe strain of nerves, he shrank from the thought of having to call at the Manor House. He was frightfully shabby, having brought down only two old suits and a bowler hat, in which he felt like an out-of-work Cockney. They were certainly out of harmony with green fields and dusty white roads. He was tempted to buy a pair of riding-breeches and short jacket displayed behind the bulging window-panes of the village tailor. Anyhow, he was ashamed to be seen by Ursula Chilvers, in his rusty black suit, shiny at the elbows, and baggy at the knees. He had several narrow escapes from an encounter. Once as he passed by the New Inn he saw Lord Cossington on a grey horse, a fine soldierly old figure in a white tall hat and brown riding-suit, sitting very straight in his saddle, while he chatted to the landlord who stood by the stirrup. And once he saw the old Catholic peer with his daughter driving out of the Manor gates in an old-fashioned open carriage with a heavy black hood. Ursula was in a filmy white dress, with a black hat. She called to the coachman to pull up outside the gates, and leant over the carriage to talk to an old woman, with a brown pippin face, puckered into a thousand wrinkles. Kelmarsh turned quickly down a footpath, before the carriage drove on again.

Yet during the week he heard a great deal about "the family." Mrs. Chant, who looked after the cottage, coming in to lay his meals and tidy up, was garrulous about Miss Ursula. There never was such a dear young lady,

she said, in her broad dialect. She hadn't a spark of pride in her, and would talk to the cottage folk as if she was no better than themselves, instead of being a lady born. She fairly doted on babies, and there wasn't an infant born in the parish that she didn't try to spoil with her dandling and cossetting. It was Mrs. Chant's belief that Providence had designed Miss Ursula to be a mother herself, and have bonny babies of her own, but the right man hadn't come along yet, which was another proof of the ways of God.

"Folks do say," said Mrs. Chant, "as Mr. Basil be the man for her, and a proper man too, being one of the family, and his lordship's heir. But they do say also, as she won't take him, he being her first cousin, and consanguinity to her, according to the Holy Scriptures and Father Fletcher; which, to my mind, do be cruel hard, and against Nature, begging the dear Lord's pardon, seeing as how they do be the handsomest young couple, and as fond as two mating birds."

Kelmarsh heard some more on the subject in the bar-parlour of the New Inn, where he dropped in one evening for a little human society and a study of rustic manners.

The New Inn was not so new as its name. It was built, according to a small local guide which Kelmarsh bought for sixpence at the all-sorts shop, in the reign of the eighth Henry, of pious memory. Even then some of its timbers were taken from an older house, so that the present structure, though it had a patchwork modernity, was at the bones, so to speak, of a respectable antiquity. Formerly it was the house of a family of yeomen farmers, who had tilled the fields around long before the coming of Norman William, and then after centuries of sturdy manhood, which spilt its blood for Plantagenet kings and rebels, and on the Royalist side in the Civil War, died out suddenly, leaving remembrance only on moss-covered stones in the churchyard. It was then that the house became an inn, and for two and a half centuries had given lodging to man and beast, and a daily hospitality in the taproom.

Kelmarsh took a seat on an oak settle in the corner, ordering a glass of ginger-beer, and watching the group of yokels near the fireplace, who, after their day's work, were having a merry evening. It seemed to him that the place had, in spite of its strong rank smell of English ale, a peculiarly ghostly atmosphere, the faint far-off odours of pipes that had long gone out as the vital sparks of the smokers had also been extinguished, the lingering exhalation of many steaming toddies that were drunk in the old toping days of Georgian England. Kelmarsh, sitting in his corner, seemed to see the ghosts of those old yokels who had fuddled themselves through the centuries under the oak beams, and who were the forefathers of these men who sat on the benches with their pewter pots talking village scandal and politics, and breaking out between whiles into curious old songs.

Kelmarsh found that the taproom was the court house of the village, where the local *causes célèbres* were tried before the bar of public opinion. The jury were also the judges, for Bodkin, the landlord, though he summed up with judicial impartiality, holding the scales nicely balanced, did not pass sentence. He was a Toby Belch of a man, with a goodly paunch and a clean-shaven face, rounded off by at least three chins. His bald head glistened under the gas jet behind the bar like a billiard ball, and when he leant over the polished counter listening with gravity to the conversation of his customers, he seemed to Kelmarsh like a red sun resting on the silver streak of the horizon. He was evidently a foe to intemperance, and to Kelmarsh's astonishment exercised a restraining influence upon the thirst of his clients.

"Drunkenness," he said, solemnly, "do be a bawdy business, Jock Widdicombe," and he refused another pint to a young lout with straw-coloured hair and a freckled face, who in a throaty baritone, which seemed to require constant wetting, had got as far as the fifth verse of "Richard of Taunton Dean," and had stuck dry in the middle of the chorus of "Dumble-down deary." This was thought rather severe by the others, who had warmed up to the old refrain, but, as Bodkin said, to Kelmarsh's

amusement, "the line must be drawn somewheres, Jock Widdicombe," and he drew it severely at the fifth pint, which was counting one for each verse.

The conversation, after summing up the whole of the world's philosophy on pigs and cattle, took a new turn, and Kelmars heard Miss Ursula's name being bandied about by a row of old men in smock frocks, who were puffing at long clay pipes.

"It do be too much religion," said one of them in a cracked old voice. "Church going every day do be onnatural to flesh and blood."

"I'd fain see the young mistress wedded and bedded," said the landlord. "She be pining away for want of a man. And the purtiest young 'ooman, as my old eyes did ever see, though I've been in furrin' parts, as all of 'ee well know."

"I'd not be sorry to see her settled," said an old yokel, like an aged white rabbit. "'Twold be good for the family, and gen'rally speaking, seeing as how the world be made for marrying."

Another old man, who, according to his own confession, had married three wives, and buried them all, said in a quavery voice, rather like the bleating of a new-born lamb, that a man cannot know a woman till he weds her, and then he finds out his own ignorance.

"There be a deal of mystery in women," he said, his old head nid-nodding ceaselessly.

Jock Widdicombe, the straw-haired young man with the long thirst, said rather sullenly that as to him he stuck to facts. He was certain Mr. Basil would do his duty by the young mistress. Last time he was down they went for long walks over the hill, three times in one week, and there was nothing to see when they got there. During the frost they did not go to the flood-fields with the village, but he saw Mr. Basil putting on the young mistress's skates on the edge of the Tinker's pool, where there wasn't any other living soul, except the puffed-out blackbirds which, according to gospel, haven't a soul to their bodies. On that same day he met them coming home from skating, and there was a light in the young mistress's eyes which,

said Jock Widdicombe, were like glow-worms on a mid-summer night.

"If that baint a fair prospect of wedding-cakes and ale, may I never taste beer again."

This was considered a stupid speech by the company, and they were unanimous in their verdict that Jock was a young "vule."

"I may be a vule," said Jock Widdicombe, sulkily, "but I can tell when a wumman's heart do shine out of her eyen."

The conversation returned to pig-breeding, and Kelmarsh went out of the bar. The gossip about Ursula Chilvers by these coarse-mouthed old rustics had rather shocked him. There was something rather horrible in a beautiful girl like Lord Cossington's daughter being made the subject of a sex-problem among these yokel-philosophers. He wondered whether their verdict was right. Was there any love-story between Basil and his cousin? Did Mrs. Chant hint at a real tragedy when she spoke of "consanguinity"? Were two lives being blighted by the tyranny of ecclesiastical laws?

Then he shrugged his shoulders as he went back to the cottage. What did it matter to him? His own problem must be settled somehow. Susy's silence was intolerable. Three weeks had now passed and still not a line from her. What on earth could he tell his people when he went up to Burslem? A feeling of anger began to smoulder in his heart. Susy's flight put him into a ridiculous and hateful position. It threatened to wreck his whole career, for how could a man do his work with this strain upon his temper and nerves, with one half of his life blighted by a woman's selfishness and stupidity? Oh, Susy had been wicked! He could almost find it in his heart to hate her. She would never be happy until she dragged him down to the level of her own vulgarity. Perhaps it would be better if she never came back to him. He would put her out of his mind and build up a new life without her, deadening, if possible, the sentiment which still made him yearn for a woman's kisses, for a woman's arms about his neck, for the sanctuary of home life.

So the man was tortured by conflicting thoughts of self-pity and anger, or remorse and revolt. He found himself unable to work. He had brought down the notes for some new designs of book-covers, but he could not concentrate his mind. He could do nothing but indulge in a morbid self-analysis. Even the quietude of the country, in which he thought he would find peace, began to pall on him. It only made him think more furiously. He must get back to London or start at once for Burslem. If he continued in this solitude he would lose his mental balance.

XXXVI

IT was in the all-sorts shop that Kelmarsh came face to face with Ursula Chilvers. The Supply Stores, as it was called grandiloquently, was next door to the New Inn, and Kelmarsh stepped inside to get some tobacco. From the old beams of a good square room, divided by a counter, there were suspended substantial hams, ready-made trousers, string of onions, flat-irons, shovels and spades, ladies' petticoats and aprons, twists of tobacco, Somersetshire cheeses, poultry, and gentlemen's braces. On the counter itself, and on the shelves behind, there were groceries of every description, great blocks of butter, loaves, socks and stockings, bedroom china, kipper-herrings, tins of sardines, bottled sweets, potatoes, boots, and treacle. Kelmarsh stood amazed before this variety of goods, while Mr. Budge, the proprietor, weighed him out two ounces of tobacco, and commented on the dryness of the weather. Then he heard a girl's voice speaking to the buxom woman on the other side of the shop, and a little ripple of laughter. He recognized both the voice and the laughter, deep-toned and melodious. He turned involuntarily, and at the same moment Ursula Chilvers

came towards him with a pleasant greeting to Mr. Budge.

Then she stopped, and gave an exclamation of surprise. "Mr. Kelmarsh!"

He took off his hat, feeling painfully nervous, without any reason for his embarrassment.

"Are you staying down here?" said the girl, holding out her hand to him with a delightful air of friendship, as though she were really glad to meet him.

He stammered something about her cousin having lent him the cottage—Eglantine Cottage. It was very good of Mr. Chilvers. He had intended to call at the Manor, but he had not been quite well—rather over-fagged, perhaps.

"But why did not Basil let us know?" said Ursula. "That is so like him! He was sure we should meet you within five minutes, and it would save a post card!"

She laughed, but she seemed really annoyed with her cousin.

They walked out of the shop together, leaving Mr. and Mrs. Budge amazed to think that the shabby young man from London was a friend of the family.

"When I told you about our little village, I hardly thought you would see it so soon," said Ursula. "We must thank Basil for that, anyhow."

She looked at him in her frank way for a moment. "You certainly look very tired, Mr. Kelmarsh. You have been working much too hard, I can see."

He admitted that he was "run down." It had been a hard session. But the quietude of the country would no doubt put him right again. It was certainly a rest cure.

She smiled. "You find it too quiet?"

"Sometimes," said Kelmarsh. "One gets so used to the noise of London . . . and I have always been a town-dweller."

Once or twice as they walked little children ran up to Ursula and caught hold of her hand or skirt, and she bent down and kissed a tiny one, her eyes lighting up with a motherly glow.

"I am the godmother to half the mites," she said to Kelmarsh.

"A fairy godmother," he said.

"I have a passion for children. They are the flowers of life. Don't you think so?"

"I think they are rather frightened of me," he answered.

She walked with him to his cottage gate.

"Won't you come in for a while?" he said, rather wistfully.

"I should like to," she said, frankly. "I love this little place. It is always so clean and fresh."

Mrs. Chant, who stood in the doorway, dropped her a curtsy, and she spoke to the good woman in her sweet voice.

Then she followed Kelmarsh into the parlour and sat in his one arm-chair while he stood by the fireplace, thinking how beautiful she was in the little room, how the simplicity of her white dress suited the place, with its oak panelling and low beams. She took off her hat, and it lay like a basket of roses in her lap. This action pleased him. It was so charming in its lack of stiffness and conventionality.

She asked him a number of questions. How long had he been down? Was he quite comfortable, and did Mrs. Chant look after him well? Would he allow her to send him some of the roses from her garden? They would make the rooms smell so fragrantly. Then she asked after Basil Chilvers, and he thought he detected a slight change in her voice as she mentioned his name, and just a slight deepening of the colour in her cheeks. But it may have been his fancy, or a richer glow of sunlight through the beaded window-panes. He wondered whether she were in love with Basil, whether she was waiting for the man to speak words which he was slow to speak, or whether there might be some barrier between them. A man would be lucky to have her love. She was like an English rose, with a pure loveliness.

So for a few minutes she chatted, and then rising, said that he must come up to her father's house one evening. Would he not come to dinner that very day? It would give them the greatest pleasure.

Kelmarsh hesitated, and looked down at his shabby suit.

"I have brought no clothes down with me," he said, awkwardly.

"Oh, in the country," said Ursula, "there is liberty in dress. We live the simple life at home. Come in any way, so long as you will come."

Kelmarsh accepted her invitation. It would be pleasant to have a little human society to lift him out of his self-consciousness. He had been getting morbid, and too introspective. He walked down to the little white gate with her, as she still carried her hat in her hand, so that the sunlight made a glamour round her hair.

"Till this evening, then," she said.

Outside the gate two children were waiting for her. Wherever she went they seemed to spring up as though she charmed them out of the ground. She caught hold of a chubby hand, and with a gay little laugh dashed off with the youngest of them. The other shouted and gave chase, and Kelmarsh, standing at the gate, watched the white figure of Ursula Chilvers speeding through an open patch of sunlight into the cool shadow of the lane. He went back into the little room, and it seemed darker now that she had gone.

At a quarter to seven that evening he pushed open the iron gate of the Manor House and walked up the winding drive. The house seemed to stand in a pool of silence. Its tall chimneys, some of them twisted into strange shapes, were black against the red sunset, and beyond the drive a great yew tree cast a long deep shadow over the emerald lawn, beyond which was the grey old building with many gables and leaden water-spouts and little casement windows, through which lights gleamed softly.

He rang a wrought-iron bell-pull, and there was a deep clanging beyond an oak door, cracked with age and bound with iron bars studded with rusty nails. How old the place seemed, and how its owners seemed to take a pride in its age! The doorstep was scooped out by the tread of many feet through centuries of time. The ivy that grew upon the walls had thick and tangled roots that

must have been planted generations ago. Kelmarsh felt as though he were knocking at the door of an enchanted castle, or the home of the Sleeping Beauty. He smiled to himself. In his bowler hat and shabby suit he was not like the young prince who would come with an awakening kiss.

Yet when the grave footman, whom he had first seen in Belgrave Square, opened the door and led him into a square hall, where at each corner stood, as it seemed, a man in mediæval armour, and where a forest of antlers was entangled on the walls, and then, after putting down his hat and stick, led him up a great oak staircase through a long gallery lined on each side by full-length portraits of bygone Chilverses, it seemed to Kelmarsh, who had lived only in modern cities, and in small suburban villas, that he had indeed stepped back in time.

The footman opened a door to the right of the gallery, and Kelmarsh found himself in a small chamber hung with tapestry and lighted only by candles, and the flames of a log burning on the hearth. Lord Cossington was there with an old gentleman in black who looked like a priest. The old soldier gave him a hearty greeting.

"This is a real pleasure!" he said. "Welcome to Bower Chilvers. Until my daughter met you to-day we had no notion of an M.P. in the village."

He introduced Kelmarsh to the old gentleman in black.

"Father Fletcher, this is Mr. Richard Kelmarsh, one of our young legislators, and a representative of the people, who have all the power nowadays."

Kelmarsh detected a twinkle in the old soldier's eyes, but it was not ill-natured.

The priest took his hand, smiling with the watery eye of old age.

"I am glad to meet you, sir," he said. "You will find Bower Chilvers a pleasant backwater of life. We are all old-fashioned down here—the old faith, the old customs. We are so old-fashioned that we fear the invasion of modernity."

"I dare say there is room for progress even in Bower Chilvers," said Kelmarsh, smiling.

"Progress!" said Father Fletcher, holding up a hand. "Oh, dreadful word! What does it mean? Ugly iron roofs instead of the old timbered barns, grey slates instead of the yellow thatch, discontent instead of quiet happiness, restlessness and revolt instead of peace. No, no, young man, withdraw the name of progress."

He gave an old man's chuckling laugh, and gave Kelmarsh's arm a little squeeze as though to say he must not take affront at his words.

Lord Cossington looked down at Kelmarsh with his keen hawk's eyes, in which there was the same twinkling mirth.

"What do you say to that?" he said. "Hopelessly reactionary, eh?"

"Yes," said Kelmarsh, quietly. "Progress must come even to Bower Chilvers. Sanitation instead of rural squalor, the divine discontent which will make even peasants claim the rights of liberty, a new order of society which will destroy the old feudalism and serfdom, and give the land to those who work on it. I have no doubt that sounds revolutionary to you, but it is my creed, and I have to confess it to be honest."

"I like your honesty," said Lord Cossington, with a frank laugh, "even though I dislike your creed." He held a candle up to a portrait of a handsome man in a ruff and trunk hose.

"By Jove!" he said, "how my ancestors would turn in their graves to hear your words! Some of them had their heads chopped off for less than that. Eh, Father Fletcher?"

"The spirit of the age," said the old priest. "The spirit of revolt against law, and order, and obedience." He touched Kelmarsh on the sleeve again. "Pardon me saying that, my dear young man; I also must be honest."

There was such a gentleness about the old man that Kelmarsh did not have to put a check upon his tongue. In spite, too, of his feebleness he had an air of quiet dignity, and his tired old eyes shone with benevolence.

Then Ursula came and asked them to go in to dinner.

Kelmarsh sat by her side, in a square room with dark panelling, so smooth and polished with age that it reflected the candle-light which flooded the oak dining-table with its array of old silver and glass. Ursula, sitting in a high chair, carved with grotesque faces and mythological animals, seemed to Kelmarsh like the princess in a fairy-tale, or like a woman of the Italian Renaissance. There was a circlet of pearls on her plaited hair, and a rope of pearls round her white throat. He admired her square-cut gown of white silk. It gave her a mediæval look which was in harmony with this house of old memories.

During the dinner Father Fletcher heard her mention Mrs. Denton and the suffrage meeting at the Caxton Hall.

"God bless me," he said to Kelmarsh, "are you the young man who has been speaking so much on women's suffrage? Yes, surely now, I remember having read your speeches!"

He seemed surprised at the discovery, and looked at Kelmarsh with new interest. Ursula, with a pretty peremptoriness, told him to get on with his meal, and her father passed a bottle of port, and said, smiling—

"Fill up your glass, Father, and no controversy."

But the old priest was not to be balked of his desire to cross swords with Kelmarsh in argument.

"You are encouraging the most dangerous movement of modern times," he said. "This so-called liberty of women will lead us to destruction if we are not very careful."

Kelmarsh took up the challenge, and gave as concisely as he could the arguments in favour of women's suffrage. Ursula and her father smiled across the table at each other. They left the field clear for the old fighter and the young.

Father Fletcher shook his head at all the points made by Kelmarsh.

"Fallacies! my dear young man," he said. "I have had much experience with women. I have worked among them in the East End of London and in the West End. I know their sufferings in poverty and in wealth. And this

I am sure of, that by their nature they are unfitted to enter the political arena and take a responsible share in the government of the country. They have not the physical strength nor the mental stability. They are naturally emotional, and emotional government is worse than despotism. . . . You say women are naturally conservative, more religious than men. Why should I be afraid of them having votes? That is so at the present time. In France, I quite admit that if women had the vote, they would sweep away an atheistic government and bring religion back to the schools. In England, if they had the vote, they would defeat their own government in its so-called settlement of the educational system—a settlement based upon injustice and agnosticism. . . . Yes, I admit all that, and so far it argues against your own desire for 'progress.' But I am not so short-sighted. I see quite well that the growing restlessness among women would have but one result if they had political power. The extremists would force the pace, and would inflame the worst passions of their most ignorant sisters. You must know as well as I do that when a woman takes the bit between her teeth she rides faster to the devil than any man. When she throws off religion she throws off all moral restraint. A man without religion is sometimes quite tolerable, though it is always sad. But a woman without religion gives one the cold shivers. . . . What is the underlying desire of these 'advanced' women? It is quite clear to me. They want to liberate themselves from moral law. Already they advocate crèches for the babies of working women, so that the mothers are not tied down by the responsibilities of motherhood. Crèches are a necessary evil among certain classes. It was the sisters of charity who first established them in East London. But they are an evil all the same, and we should try to check the necessity for them, and not increase them as a general encouragement to irresponsible maternity. Then next? These women who cry for the vote are already advocating the State aid of mothers, married and unmarried. What does that mean? . . . Apart from religion and morality, it means the destruction of home-life

and the consequent stunting of natural affection. The mother who does not suffer for her children does not love them.

"The very meaning of love is sacrifice. If a man and wife are not bound to one another by common responsibilities, by self-denial, by the struggle to obtain food for their offspring, by the joys that come from a successful fight against difficulties and hardships, the bond will be easily shuffled off. There will be passing affection instead of life-long patience, which is the truest test of love. . . . If women have votes they will enter Parliament. If they go into the House they will get into the Government. You cannot draw a line of demarcation when once the principle of equality is conceded. And a government of women would lead a nation to ruin. They are often hysterical, owing to well-known physiological laws. Hysteria in government is more dangerous than deliberately designed wickedness. For deliberate wickedness, thank God, is always unpopular. . . . No, no, my friend, you have only studied this question superficially. You have not struck deep enough. You do not understand the underlying currents of women's nature."

Kelmarsh was heated in his answer to the old priest. It seemed as if there would be a "scene" over the dinner-table, but Ursula Chilvers rose with a ripple of laughter, and, taking the priest by the shoulders, told him to come with her into the drawing-room and listen to her singing as a dreadful penance for his intolerance and argumentative temper.

The old man got up, and, taking her hand, patted it and slipped it through his arm.

"My dear," he said, "you are very wise and good. Words are traps which the devil puts about one's lips. Music is the language of the angels."

In the drawing-room, when Ursula sat at the piano, the priest came over to Kelmarsh, and taking a chair beside him, put his hand on his knee.

"Forgive me," he said. "I am an old man, and I have not even yet learnt to be patient with ideas that seem false to me. No doubt you have much to say on

your side. Believe me, I understand that you want to remove injustice and to promote happiness. But, as a priest, I believe there is only one remedy for all the social evils of our time—religion. That means unselfishness. . . . That means submission and sacrifice. Men would not be so brutal to their wives if they were ruled by religion. Women would not suffer so much if men were inspired by a love of God. All the evils of the world are due to the denial of those good words, 'Love one another.' Those words are not heard so often now that religion has been banished from so many hearts. They are the only true socialism."

He raised his hand and said "Hush!" as Ursula began to sing, and presently, when the girl's deep notes filled the room, Kelmarsh saw that the old man's eyes were moist with tears, and there was a shining look upon his face.

The music, too, stole into Kelmarsh's heart, softening it with a sudden tenderness. He thought over the priest's words. There was some truth in them. After all, religion was an element in life not to be denied or ignored. Such a nature as Ursula's could not have been built up without a spiritual training, which had filled her with a kind of divine purity and simplicity.

When he took his leave late in the evening he murmured a few words of apology for introducing controversy into the Manor House.

"I have been brought up in a modern school," he said, "and when I come into the heart of the country I cannot forget the tragedy of life in the great cities."

The old peer held his hand in a warm clasp. "My dear young man," he said, "it is good for us old fogies to hear the hot words of rebellious youth. The spirit of youth is rebellious. . . ." His smiling face became rather grave. . . . "Believe me," he said, "I see much to admire in your socialistic ideals, though I think in practice they would hardly work. You denounce . . ."

"Father," cried Ursula, "you are beginning all over again!"

"It is my fault," said Kelmarsh, laughing. "I have a bad effect upon people."

He went down the steps of the old Manor House and turned to see Ursula standing there with the light of an iron lamp shedding its rays upon her. She seemed like a spirit of one of the fair women who in olden days must have stood on the same threshold by the same oak door.

As he plunged into the darkness of the drive, the music of her voice and her smiling beauty haunted him.

XXXVII

URSULA CHILVERS came several times to Eglantine Cottage. She came bringing a great bouquet of roses, and put them in a bowl on the little round table in the parlour, so that the room was all glorious with colour and fragrance. And she came bringing little cakes of her own making, with a pretty pride in her skill, begging him to give her pleasure by saying if he liked them. He liked them so well that they seemed to him fairy cakes, cooked in an earth oven for a pixies' feast. So he said, making her laugh at his fanciful idea. Once she stayed to tea with him, and he made her pour out for him and preside over the bread and butter. They were mirthful over the little meal, and for once Kelmarsh forgot his grievances against life and his haunting melancholy, remembering only that for this brief hour at least life was a pleasant thing, with this beautiful girl sitting at his board, as if she were——. He checked the thought hurriedly with a sudden indrawing of breath. He was going to say to himself, "as if she were my wife," and then he remembered, what he had forgotten for a moment, that somewhere in England was a girl named Susy Kelmarsh, his wife, though she had fled from him. Was he doing

right to keep that secret from the girl who smiled at him with candid eyes, from this girl who asked him a hundred questions about his life and work, which he answered without a word of that one fact which was the central thing in his fate? All his words were lies while he kept that fact locked up in his heart. He was a living lie to Ursula, who believed that he was a single man carving out a career without other responsibilities.

He would have been glad to lean forward over the table and say: "Miss Chilvers, I am a married man. I have a wife who hates every ideal I hold dear, a wife who has so soon tired of me, that she has gone away to the vicious life of the stage. I do not know her whereabouts nor whether she will ever come back." The words sometimes were on his lips, and once he could see that he startled Ursula by the sudden and long-drawn sigh with which he ended a laugh. But he could not tell. He could not tell her of his frightful mistake, of those pitiful quarrels which had led to separation, of that vulgar, ignorant child to whom he was tied so long as he should live. After all, why should he tell her? It was better to say nothing to check that rippling laughter which was such sweet music in his ears, to stop those visits to the cottage which made the place a little paradise. Perhaps if he told her she would not come, believing, no doubt, as she would, that the blame was his. She had accused him already, though in a smiling way, of intellectual arrogance. She had said that he was inconsistent, and though he advocated votes for women, he was too strong-willed to submit his judgment to any woman.

So Kelmarsh did not mention Susy, and as the days passed he banished Susy from his brain. She did not love him any more. Why should he remember? She had deserted him. Why should he torture himself at the thought of her? Perhaps she had done worse. Darlington was still away from London. He heard that from Dunstan. Could he quite banish the thought that Susy was under the influence of that man, perhaps in his power? At first the idea had maddened him. He was so stirred with passion against Darlington that he understood what

he had never before understood, the sudden impulse that prompts a man to murder. But now another thought more terrible seemed to whisper in his brain, devilishly. If Susy had gone away with Darlington, he could cast her off and regain his liberty. His liberty! O God! His liberty!

Then he blanched and trembled at the horrible suggestion. Was it possible that such an idea could harbour in his brain? Could he be such a dreadful scoundrel as to desire liberty at the price of sin—Susy's sin? He shuddered violently, and crushed down the evil thought under the heel of his will.

But it came to him again, swiftly and overwhelmingly. It was when he was walking with Ursula on the hill above the village. He had met her down the winding path and asked whether he might walk with her. It was in the afternoon and the sun was hot, and the air seemed to quiver with the heat. The larks were singing with monotonous ecstasy, and on the hillside, where flocks were browsing over the thin pasture, was the tinkling of sheep-bells.

"Pouff!" said Ursula. "It is too warm and too tiring. It is funny how London men walk straight under the sun, while country people are grateful for the shade."

"I am a fanatic for sun," said Kelmarsh. "But if you like we will sit under this hedge. It would be pleasant on that soft turf among the daisies."

She was grateful for the rest, and sat on the grass plucking the daisies like a child, and weaving a chain with them.

Kelmarsh flung himself at her feet. "Oh, this is good," he said, "this is good!"

He watched the girl with half-closed eyes as she entwined the daisies. How beautiful she was with her white dress on the emerald grass, in the shadow of the hedge through which there came little patches of sunlight spangling her with gold. When the daisy-chain was finished she took off her hat and crowned herself with the circlet of flowers.

"You are Titania," he said.

She laughed. "I am a child; I shall never be grown up."

"Yes," he answered, "you are a child. You have the innocence of the world's springtime. I am an old man, wrinkled with the cares of centuries and filled with the knowledge of evil."

"Oh, you must grow young," said Ursula. "You must forget the cities. Pluck some daisies and I will crown you too. The little flowers will give you back the spirit of youth."

She was in a merry mood, and Kelmarsh obeyed her wish, and, picking a great bunch of daisies, strewed them in her lap.

"There are the jewels," he said.

It was then that the evil thought seized him, the thought that if Susy had sinned he might be free. It was a kind of midsummer madness. Perhaps the heat had really touched his brain. He was filled with the sudden desire to fall on his knees in the grass before this smiling girl, to take her white hands and press them against his forehead, to put his head on her lap among the flowers and to rest there, dreaming under the spell of her enchantment.

But while this folly filled his brain as he lay propping his face on his hands and watching her, she did not suspect his wild thoughts, and presently she put the chain of flowers on his head. He felt the touch of her white fingers and closed his eyes for a moment.

"I crown you with the magic circle," she said, smiling; "while you wear this the cares of life shall not come to you."

She had risen to crown him, and he was on his knees before her. He took one of her hands and kissed it.

"Princess," he said, "how can I repay you?"

The words seemed part of the game—this child's game between a man and woman. But there was something in his voice, something in his white face that startled Ursula Chilvers.

She withdrew her hand with a nervous little laugh. "It is time to go home," she said. "My father will wonder where I am." She took the daisies from her hair and dropped them into the grass. "Poor things!" she said pitifully.

Kelmarsh took off his own circlet of flowers, replacing them by his hard bowler hat. It was a symbolical act. But he kept the flowers in his hand, and carried them with him.

They walked down the hillside and into the winding lane, rather silently, until they came to the little white gate of his cottage.

"Will you come up to the Manor to-night?" said Ursula. "My father has promised to be good and put a ban on politics."

He did not answer, for Mrs. Chant came out with a telegram. "It came an hour since," she said.

Kelmarsh took the pink envelope. It was redirected from Brixton.

Ursula moved away. "Until this evening," she said. - Kelmarsh answered her, "Yes, until this evening."

Then he went into the cottage feeling rather faint and dizzy. It was a message from Susy, he was sure, from the wife he had forgotten for a little while on the hillside and then remembering had hated with evil thoughts. In the parlour he tore open the envelope. It was a short message.

"I am ill. Come to me Richard. Susy. 301 Brindle Street, Manchester."

He let the telegram fall, and by its side fell the chain of daisies.

He stared through the window into the sun-flooded garden. His face was very white and his eyes burned feverishly. Something seemed to break inside his heart, and he sat down breathing heavily with a hard sob, his head resting on his arms, which were spread out on the little table.

Presently he got up and went quietly to Mrs. Chant, who was in the kitchen.

"I have to go away at once," he said. "I have been called suddenly to town." He stayed only to write a letter. It was to Ursula Chilvers, and was very short.

"I have had bad news," he said. "My wife is ill,

and sends for me. I did not tell you I was married ; I ought to have done perhaps. If you think so, forgive me, I can hardly explain. I thank you from my heart for your great kindness to me. Perhaps I may meet you in London again."

He asked Mrs. Chant to take the note to the Manor, and then paid the woman for her services, and giving her his thanks, he strode out of the cottage, and walked five miles along the white road to the railway station. And on the way his wife's message throbbed into his brain.

"I am ill. Come to me Richard."

XXXVIII

WHEN Susy left her home at Brixton she carried a lightly packed bag as far as the station, and travelled by the electric car to Westminster. She changed the one half-crown in her purse for the two-penny fare, and then sat folding and unfolding the ticket in her lap until it fell to bits. Her face was white, and there were black rings round her eyes, but the line of her mouth was hard, and to those who knew her would have been a warning of danger.

Susy had not faltered when she looked round her bedroom in the little house at Brixton, as she believed for the last time. Her anger against Richard choked down her self-pity. She had worked herself up into a state of rebellion against him, and the words which he had used when he discovered her with Darlington seemed like daggers which had killed her love. Yet several times as she sat in the car some secret voice whispered to her to start up and ring the bell, and stop the car which was taking her away. Once she half rose in her seat, but with a sudden flush overspreading her face sat down again, and stared out of the window opposite.

At Westminster she hailed a cab, and told the man to drive her to the Tillière Training School in the Charing Cross Road. It was a shilling fare, and when she paid it she had only one and fourpence left. In the doorway of a tall building, four young men in riding-dress with gaiters were making passes at each other with their walking-sticks, while three young women with fluffy hair and muslin dresses tied up with baby bows stood eating chocolates, and laughing with shrill staccato cries at the duellists. The men dropped their sticks to let Susy pass into the entrance-way, and the girls stared at her as she went through.

She went up several flights of stone stairs, listening to the noises which came through the closed doors. They were extraordinary noises for any respectable house in the Charing Cross Road. On one landing there was the sound of a chorus of male voices singing a rollicking sea-song. Up another flight there was the dump, dump of a heavy stick on bare boards, a heel-and-toe clatter, and an old man's voice shouting out—

“Vy vill you not keep ze time? *Mein Gott, mein Gott*, you dance altogether at ze different time!”

From one door came the strains of a stringed band playing frightfully out of tune, so that it seemed as if every performer were trying to get ahead of his neighbour. Then, on a higher floor, Susy put her head into a room filled with girls in short blue serge frocks, low-necked blouses, and pink dancing slippers on black-stockinged feet. Some of them were going through extraordinary contortions against a round pole fixed along one side of the room, at about four feet from the floor. Putting one foot on the pole, they stretched out their right leg to the furthest extent, and repeated this practice again and again with an effect that would have seemed remarkably comic to anyone less familiar with the sight than Susy. Other young women were standing on one leg, while a friend seized the other and bent it backwards until the sole of the foot was flat against the head. In the middle of the room a flying squadron of girls were pirouetting on one toe backwards and forwards before a little lady in black,

who, lifting her skirt above her ankles, was going through the same performance with an ease and grace which were the envy of the other young women, who ejaculated expressions of dismay at their own clumsiness.

Suddenly the little lady in black caught sight of Susy standing in the doorway. She threw up her hands in astonishment, and then ran towards her with a cry of delight.

"Ma chérie! Ma petite Susy! How it is good of you to visit your old mistress! It is a thousand years since I have the good pleasure to see my little one."

She caught hold of her hands, and Susy, with a sudden gush of tears in her eyes, kissed her on each cheek.

"I cannot stay," she said hurriedly. "But I wanted to take a peep at you again, madam."

"You are looking pale. You have two black eyes. You are no longer my merry Susy!" She whispered to her in a dramatic way. "Why did you leave the dancing? Tell me that. You have not been unfortunate? So many of my best girls are unfortunate. Ah, the men! *Quels bêtes!*"

"No, no!" said Susy. "I am very happy." She crushed the woman's hands between her own. "Tell me—is Mr. Simonetti here to-day? The 'Butterfly' crowd are still rehearsing?"

"Yes, it is their last day. They start to-night."

"Thank God!" said Susy, under her breath. "Then I am not too late, perhaps."

"He is upstairs," said the little woman. "They make a stampede over my head. But you do not say the truth. You are unhappy. The heart is a tell-tale. I see, oh! so much tell-tale in those eyes."

Susy laughed with an hysterical note in her voice. "You are always the same, madam. If I coughed you used to say it was consumption. No, no, I cannot sit down. See, all the young ladies are waiting for you." She released her hands from the woman's clasp, laughed into her anxious eyes, and then, with a "Good-bye, madam!" ran out of the room.

She went upstairs to the next floor and opened another

door, leading into a big square room. Close to the door was a cottage piano, where a pale young man with long black hair sat playing a march tune while he smoked a cigarette, and chatted to a short fat man with a bowler hat cocked sideways on his head, and the unlighted stump of a cigar in his mouth. As Susy entered, the pale pianist, seeing her, dropped the cigarette from his lips, and said—

“Ulloh! ulloh! You back agin?”

“Yes,” said Susy, “if I can get back. Where’s the boss?”

The pianist, still thumping out the march tune, jerked his head towards the other side of the room.

“You’ll always find ’im among the girls. Ain’t ’e giving ’em beans to-day? Oh dear, no, not at all!”

Thirty girls were marching round the room in mazy evolutions, with extraordinary movements of the hips, with their heads held down sideways in a curious affectation of coyness, and with fixed smiles which seemed to have no mirth, as their eyes were dull and weary. Something went wrong with the twisting and turning of the march, and they got into a hopeless tangle.

A thin man, with a mass of grey hair and a keen foreign-looking face, seized his hair with both hands and lifted himself up on his toes.

“*Accidenti!*” he almost screamed. “Vat in devil’s name is de use of all my teachings? Here is de last day of de dam rehearsals. To-morrow you play at Liverpool. Mees Valery, you are a big fool! You are no fit to lead de goose-step in a farmyard! I give you de sack. You go now, *presto!* I vill pay you von mont’s vages; but, by gum! I vill not ’ave you disgrace my company. I have de extreme pleasure to bid you good day and good riddance, Signorina.”

A girl stepped out of the ranks with a white face and burning eyes, and with her chin held very high, she walked straight to the door.

“You can keep your dirty wages till I send my lawyer for them,” she said. “There’ll be trouble over this, Mr. Simonetti. I’ll bring you into court for it.”

Mr. Simonetti waved his hands wildly. “I bid you good

day," he said, repeating himself several times. "You've been de curse of my life dis five week since."

The door slammed behind the girl, and then Susy, who had watched the scene with grave eyes, stepped forward, and said very quietly—

"I will take my old place again if you like, Mr. Simonetti."

The Italian started back with his arms up in the air; then he rushed forward and seized her hands.

"My dear Mees Susy! You 'ave come back! Dis is a miracle! Yet I was in hopes, after what my good Darlington was saying. I sent you a message, and you 'ave answered it at de very moment I was in distraction. It is very good. It is very good."

"I would like to speak to you in the next room," said Susy.

The Italian waved his hands to the thirty young women. "Continue, if you please," he said. "I go and come back." He put his hand on Susy's arm, and led her into a small room where there were three girls typing. "You leave us for five small minutes," he said. Then he turned to Susy with twinkling eyes. "So you come back again? So the little wife gets tired of her nest? Hey?"

"We will leave that part of the story out," said Susy, quietly. "The fact is this. I am ready to play my old part again on tour at the same screw. And I want a week's money down, as I am quite broke."

Mr. Simonetti pulled out a handful of gold and silver, and counted out three pounds ten.

"Vy not?" he said. "It is yours. I know you a very honest little lady, and if you vill answer no questions, I do not ask dem."

"Thanks," said Susy. "When do they start?"

"Dey go away dis very night, and if dat dam fool Valery went with dem dey vould go to make de laughing stock in Liverpool, in Bradford, in Leeds, in Bolton, in Manchester. I vill rest easy now I 'ave you back again, my dear."

"I have not forgotten the show," said Susy. "One

rehearsal will put me right again, and I can brush up my words in the train."

Mr. Simonetti was quite agreeable. Susy Sullivan had led his chorus in the "Butterfly Girl" for three months in town, and it was luck to get her for the tour to the provinces in the place of a girl who had been lazy, rebellious, and bad-tempered.

During the journey to Liverpool Susy sat in the corner of a third-class carriage studying her old part. At times the words swam before her eyes, and she thought of Richard and his home-coming to the deserted house. Her heart ached at the thought with a physical pain as though a sharp knife were sticking into her side. She felt very sorry for him, though she hated him. Yes, she hated him, she was sure of that. Oh, he had treated her abominably! He had never understood her. It had been a wretched, miserable time after the first few weeks. Then she fixed her mind on the foolish words of her "book," on the choruses which she had sung in the old days with so much gusto. How stupid they seemed now, how utterly stupid, and vulgar!

The third-class carriage was full of "the crowd," the ladies and gentlemen of the chorus, who were in the highest spirits. The fat man with the bowler hat cocked on one side, who had been talking to the pale pianist at Tillière's, was sitting opposite, and told comical anecdotes of old experiences on tour which were received with loud laughter as the train rattled northward. Presently one of the other gentlemen produced a pack of cards, and arranged a game of nap on newspapers spread on the laps of the travellers. The fat man was left out of the game, and turned his attention to Susy.

He remarked that she was very studious.

She put on a smile, which left her face quickly, and went on reading.

He hoped they would be good friends on tour, because he was a lonely orphan and needed a woman's gentle smiles to cheer him upon the mournful way.

Susy frowned and remarked that she had as much as

she could do to learn her part. Perhaps he would kindly permit her to read.

The fat man said that so far from interrupting her it would be a delight to him to give her the cues.

She declined his offer with thanks.

He said that her face was very familiar to him. Had she by any chance crossed his unhappy path in the Vale of Tears?

Susy thought not.

The fat man took a bag of acid tablets out of his pocket and begged her to wet her whistle with one. He had found from long experience that an acid tablet taken at intervals added to the gaiety of nations and to the consolation of the human heart.

Susy said she was not drawn to them.

He expressed his conviction that she was a mystic above the ordinary weaknesses of the mortal flesh. Would she permit him to suck one of the tablets in her presence?

Susy said he could eat the whole bagful, including the paper, if he would only turn his conversation to some other lady less engaged.

"Alas!" said the man, "they are all engaged and some of them married, though they call themselves Miss. Which reminds me of quite a delightful little story."

He launched into the tale, and followed it on with other anecdotes in the serio-comic line. Susy found herself laughing in spite of herself, and abandoning her book, forced herself to be sociable, knowing from old experience that life would be made unbearable for her in "the crowd" if she held aloof from the others. At times she forgot her recent life; it seemed as if she had never left the old wandering ways, with these boys and girls, who talked the slang of the stage, who laughed at the slightest excuse for laughing, and looked upon life as a giddy joke with grim interludes. She knew that underneath all this noisy merriment there was bitterness, sharp-edged envy, disappointment, weariness. But it was the code of these people to shrug their shoulders at Fate, and to make a jest even of their own wretchedness, to seize the gaiety of the moment,

and to forget the hardships of yesterday. That was the best philosophy. She, too, would steel her heart with this kind of courage, and learn to laugh without a reason.

She laughed now with rather a shrill note at the puns and quips which flew from one end of the carriage to the other, and no one seeing her flushed face and sparkling eyes would have guessed that Susy had abandoned her husband after a night of agonizing grief. No one would have guessed unless they had followed her to the wretched lodging-house in a back street in Liverpool, where that night she lay upon her bed without undressing, crying until she was utterly exhausted, and until at last she fell into a feverish sleep.

When next morning she glanced at herself in the looking-glass, she was startled by her own white face and sunken eyes. For the first time in her life she put a touch of rouge upon her cheeks before going to the theatre. She dared not let the manager see her looking so miserable and ugly. She was glad that she had no time for brooding that day. A rehearsal was called for ten o'clock, and the manager—a Mr. Jackson—had no mercy on the company. He had all he could do "to lick the crowd into shape," as he called it, before the curtain rang up for the evening performance. Before that hour came Susy ached in every limb, but she only remembered the ache in her heart, except for its dull, subconscious pain, when she stood idly in the wings while the principals went through their parts. Then she wondered whether she could ever go through the piece, whether she could laugh and sing before the foot-lights without revealing to the men of Liverpool in the stalls that she was likely to shriek herself silly in hysterics. Yet, curiously, the company, or "crowd," as she called them, did not notice anything amiss with her. They were still fooling during the long rehearsals, though they must have been as physically tired as she, and she chatted and giggled with a desperate effort which seemed successful, though to herself her own voice sounded strange and quite unnatural.

She went through her part so well when the curtain at last rang up to the cat-calls of the gallery boys, that after-

wards Mr. Jackson came and spoke a few words of praise to her.

"You're a credit," he said. "If only the other lot could put your spirit into the work. But they're all wooden heads."

Then he stared at her, and gave a sudden ejaculation, for while the principals were still taking their calls, she flopped against a piece of scenery in the wings, attacked by a sudden faintness.

The fat man, whose name she now knew to be Horace Verney, made a grab at her and saved her from falling.

"This comes of your working us all to death," he said. "It's next door to murder, Mr. Jackson, that's what it is."

"Don't talk sky-bosh," said the manager. "Hold the girl while I get my brandy-flask."

He ran off to his room, and came back in a moment with the brandy. But Susy was standing up, pushing the hair off her forehead.

"I'm all right," she said. "I'm sorry to make such a fool of myself."

"You'd better take a nip of this," said Mr. Jackson. "It'll put some buck into you."

Susy shook her head and said that all she wanted was a good night's rest. Verney insisted on seeing her home, and paid for a four-wheeled cab to her lodging. On the way he told a story of how he had once fasted through sheer poverty so long that he swooned across the footlights, and nearly burnt himself to death. He was dismissed from the company for being drunk and incapable. This reminiscence seemed to him immensely funny, and, indeed, he told it with so many droll details that Susy found herself laughing.

"Why, now," he said, "that does me good! It's beautiful how one's own misfortunes may amuse the idle hours of one's friends!" When he said good-bye at the door of her lodging-house he patted her hand in a fatherly way. "Look here," he said, "I'm the low comedy gent of the crowd, but somewhere about me I've got a thing

called a heart. If you want a friend on this tour, don't forget Horace Verney."

Susy found others in the crowd ready to befriend her. The principal lady, a stout young woman who was inclined to be haughty with the other chorus girls, took her under special protection, and made her come into her dressing-room between the scenes, and gave her tea and bovril which she boiled up in a little spirit-kettle. Mr. Jackson, also, was more considerate towards her than to any of the others, whom he treated with habitual brutality, and "the crowd" generally showed a good deal of sympathy towards her. The truth was that Susy was getting weaker every day and could not hide the fact. Actors and actresses are not, as a rule, lacking in humanity, in spite of all their little jealousies and quarrels, and in Susy's case they showed the best side of their character. Between themselves they came quickly to the conclusion that she was in the first stages of consumption, but Horace Verney had another theory. He tapped the left side of his chest, and said the girl's trouble was in that direction.

"Lungs?" said Miss Flannery, the principal lady.

"No," said Verney, "heart . . . 'concealment like a worm i' the bud,' and so forth."

Perhaps his diagnosis of the case was not far wrong. Susy herself was worried over this weakness, which made her wonder whether she would get through the tour without a complete breakdown, but she believed that the disease was not of a physical nature. Her emotions were wearing her out. During the day when she stayed in her lodgings, and at night after the theatre, she was fighting a ceaseless spiritual combat. She yearned to fly away from the play-acting life back to the quiet retreat of her home with Richard. All the old joy of the life had gone, and it was now utterly distasteful to her. Among the chattering men and women in the company she felt ill-at-ease. She could not longer join in their careless, light-hearted fooleries, which in the old days had seemed such good fun. She sickened at the smell of the footlights and of the grease-paint. She loathed the songs she sang, with their suggestive lines which aroused the coarse mirth

of the audience. She danced with feet that seemed as heavy as lead, and without any of the old abandon with which she had tripped on the boards with swirling skirts. All the vulgarity, all the squalor of this way of earning a livelihood, were revealed to her in a glaring light. But that was as nothing in the sum of her misery. It was the loneliness, the awful dreary loneliness, which tortured her. She had been lonely in the little house at Brixton waiting through the weary hours for Richard. But this utter solitude of soul in a crowd of people, to whom she had to show a smiling face, was less endurable. Every day she was tempted to write to Richard, saying that she would return to him. Several times she wrote the letter, but tore up the sheets with passionate reproach at her own weakness. No, she could never go back; she was too proud to crawl back, a wounded creature, seeking the protection of a master who had always despised her.

At times she pretended to herself that she hated him, yet if he had come suddenly before her she would perhaps have fallen down before him and laid her head at his feet, begging forgiveness and one more chance. At times she cried out in anger at all that she had suffered because of her love for him. But the truth was that it was pride alone that kept her from writing. Susy Sullivan had always been proud. Now that was her last strength, and she vowed to herself, with a sinking heart, that she would die rather than slink back to the man she had deserted.

The thought of her husband always brought another man's face before her mental vision, too vividly, though she tried to thrust it away. Richard had been unkind and hard; Phil Darlington had been very kind, and never failing in his quiet sympathy. What a fool she had been to flout the man who understood her nature, who had always been her good comrade, and who had none of the moral superiority of a man with convictions and ideals! Darlington was just an easy-going actor, who took life as he found it without any desire to play the reformer. Perhaps she would have been happier with him. Susy shivered at the thought. She knew that if she did not fight against it desperately it would become a haunting temptation

too strong for any weak and lonely woman. Here, again, her pride was her only safeguard. A word sent over the wire would bring Darlington by the quickest train, and he would look into her eyes with his old wistful smile, and hold her hands in his strong grasp, so that she would never be able to go back to Richard. It was a temptation of poisonous sweetness. But she would not yield to it. She would at least hold her head up as an honest woman. Richard should never say that she had left him because his suspicions had been true. She would not give him that excuse for his cruel accusations when he came home late at night to find the actor asleep in the little sitting-room. And yet . . . it would be a joyful thing to pour out her woes to Darlington, to bring him into her solitude, and to talk for an hour or two with a comrade who understood her, and would not be hard. But she must not! She was too weak to put herself in harm's way. She was no longer a child, ignorant of peril.

Susy went from Liverpool to Bolton, to Bradford, Oldham, Wigan, and Leeds, and then, still thinking out the same problem, still on the rack of emotion which left her weaker every day, she came with "The Butterfly" company to Manchester. That was her last journey. After the third night's performance, when "the crowd" were to go south to Birmingham, she told the manager that he must fill up her place, as she could go no farther.

"I must cave in at last," she said. "If I drag myself on to the boards again, I shall probably drop down dead before the footlights, and that will be unpleasant for everybody."

She gave a laugh that was half a sob, and then burst into tears.

Mr. Jackson said "Good God!" three times with increased emphasis; then, seeing that the girl was really very ill, he behaved decently enough. Taking her in a cab to her lodging, he told the landlady to give her every attention, and, if necessary, to send for a doctor.

Before he left Susy he put down three weeks' salary on the hall table, and said that if she wanted any more she had only to write and let him know. He would make that

all right with the directors, who were pretty good in such cases.

"But look here, my girl," he said, "where are your people? Let me send them a wire. You mustn't stay like this alone."

Susy was sitting back on a wooden chair in the hall, with her head resting limply against the wall.

"You are frightfully kind," she said. "I can't thank you now. . . . If you could send one message I should be glad. It's to Phil Darlington, of the 'Jolly Jack' Company. I believe they're in Sheffield."

"Yes," said Jackson. "What shall I say?"

"Send him my address and tell him to come at once." Then she added, "Perhaps he will be too late, anyhow; I believe I'm going to be very ill."

"You're fagged out, that's what it is," said Jackson. "Well, I'll send the message . . . and look here, I'm sorry if I worked you too hard. I ought to have put up an understudy."

"That's all right," said Susy. "So long, and many thanks. Give my love to the girls. They've all been very good to me."

Mr. Jackson said good-bye rather huskily, and then hurried away. He had all the baggage to look after, and a train to catch.

But he sent a telegram to Darlington, thinking, with rather an effort of imagination, of what drama there was in life outside the theatre.

That night Susy slept feverishly, with strange dreams about Richard. She dreamt that she was at home with him, and that they were washing up in the scullery, laughing like children. Then it seemed to her that she was addressing a great public meeting, telling a crowd of women that she loved Richard so much that she would always vote for the Labour party, though she knew nothing about politics. In another dream she saw herself surrounded by children exactly like Richard, and they were all begging her not to go away and leave them. In the morning, when she woke up, she felt strangely happy, and for a few minutes she lay drowsily wondering whether

Richard had gone downstairs to make a cup of tea. Then suddenly she remembered, and looking round the barely furnished bedroom of this Manchester lodging-house, all her misery came back to her and filled her with a dull despair. She remembered also that Mr. Jackson had promised to send a message to Darlington, and she started up with a cry of fear.

It was Sunday morning, and the bells were ringing for church. She got up and dressed herself, startled, as she looked in the glass, at her flushed face and burning eyes. She was panic-stricken at the thought that in an hour or two Darlington might knock at her door. What should she say to him? How could she escape from him? She had the wild thought of creeping out of the house before he came. She was tempted to take the train to London, and to seek a sanctuary with Mrs. Birch at the Bloomsbury boarding-house. There was a tap at the door, and she stood up with her hand to her heart, wondering if this was Darlington. But it was only the lodging-house slut, who brought her a cup of tea with some bread-and-butter.

She drank the tea eagerly, and it seemed to give her a little strength and courage. Then she was surprised to find herself hungry, and ate the thick bread-and-butter like a famished creature, remembering that she had not had any food since four o'clock on the previous day.

Half an hour later there was another tap at the door, and this time she was not startled, believing it to be the girl again, who had come to fetch the tea-things. It was the girl, but she held the door open and said—

“A young man to see you, Miss.”

Susy rose, white and trembling, and Phil Darlington strode into the room.

“Hullo!” he said, cheerfully. “You might have knocked me down with a feather when I got your wire. How the dickens did you get into this part of the world?”

The door closed behind the kitchen-maid, and then Darlington altered his tone of voice, and taking Susy's hands, looked down into her face.

"What has happened?" he said, anxiously. "You look frightfully ill; what on earth is the matter?"

She took her hands from him and put them up to her temples, as though her brain were throbbing.

"Oh, Phil," she said, with a kind of gasp.

Then she sat down on a horse-hair sofa and began to cry.

Darlington put his hand on her shoulder. "Susy," he said, rather huskily, "I have travelled all night to see you. Tell me what is the trouble. Where is Kelmarsh?"

"I have left him," said Susy. "After that scene—that horrible night—I could not stand it any longer. . . . I think I shall never go back."

Darlington suddenly went pale and breathed heavily. For a moment it seemed as if he were tempted to put his arms round the girl. He bent down towards her with burning eyes, but then something in her face, a little movement of her body as though she shrank from him, seemed to perplex him. He walked across to the window, and looked out into the grey street.

"What have you been doing since you left him?" he asked.

Susy told her story in a few words, and at the news that she had been touring with "The Butterfly" "crowd," he gave a soft whistle expressing his amazement.

"My poor little Susy," he said. "You haven't had a very gay time that's certain."

He pulled back one of the window-curtains so that there was more light on her face.

"Susy," he said, "you are looking horribly ill."

"I feel it," she said. "I feel as limp as a rag, Phil."

He went close to her, and then dropped on one knee by the side of the horse-hair sofa where she sat, and took one of her hands.

"How thin!" he said. "And it used to be so soft and plump."

She drew the hand away, and a look of fright came into her eyes.

"Sit over there, Phil," she said. "I—I am sure you are tired."

He laughed and gave her a curious glance. But he got up quickly and went over to the arm-chair, sitting on its arm, and tapping his boot with his stick.

"It was very good of you to come, Phil," said Susy.

"Was it?" he said. "Why did you ask me?"

"I was so lonely, so horribly lonely."

"Yes," he said. "I was feeling a bit that way too."

He poked the carpet with his stick. Then he let the stick drop, and caught hold of the chair in a hard grip.

"I have come a long way to see you," he said. "I suppose it wasn't for a little idle chatter? You wanted my help? You know I would do anything in the world for you."

He stood up, strode forward a pace, and held out his arms.

"Susy," he said. "Oh, my God, little girl——"

Susy had also stood up, and as he came forward she shrank back, putting up her hand with a strange gesture.

Darlington's head was thrust forward a little, and his arms were still outstretched, when he saw the expression of her face, and a strange look of terror in her eyes; he dropped his arms to his side, and then with a long-drawn quivering sigh wiped a little sweat off his forehead.

"Don't let us be foolish, Phil," said Susy.

"No," he said. "Certainly not."

"You have always been very good to me, Phil. . . . That is why I asked you to come. I knew I could rely on you, on your honour."

"So are we all," said Darlington, with a short laugh. "All honourable men." He pulled out his watch. "I shall have to be going soon," he said. "There are very few trains back to Sheffield to-day."

"Going?" cried Susy, in dismay. "Oh, not yet, not for a long time!"

He stared at her for a moment, and then gave another curious laugh.

"What a quaint little girl you are," he said.

"Do you think it quaint that I should want to talk to you?" said Susy. Her lower lip trembled.

"No," said Darlington, "I didn't mean that. I meant

something else. But tell me, what are you going to do? You can't possibly stay in this vile hole."

Susy put the palms of her hands to her head.

"Oh," she cried. "Oh! I don't know what to do."

Darlington was silent, and his forehead was wrinkled into a frown.

"Perhaps I shall die," said Susy, presently, in a choking voice. "That would be best."

Darlington was still silent. He stood looking down at the girl with a grave and rather hard face, which expressed none of the strange emotions that seemed to be burning in his brain. Susy waited for him to speak. Then with a sudden impatience she cried out fretfully—

"Can't you speak? Won't you give me any comfort?"

Darlington raised his eyebrows and a smile flickered over his face.

"My poor kid," he said. "What can I do? What can I say? When I first set out on this journey, I thought, perhaps—well, something rather foolish, rather cad-dish."

He hesitated, then he bent forward, speaking hurriedly, with his eyes looking down on the carpet.

"This is no time for vague words. I will tell you the truth. I came here thinking that you had cut away from Kelmarsh and wanted me to take care of you. . . . I hear you shiver. . . . I know you are afraid of me. . . . I saw that in your face when I first came in. You were sorry you had sent for me. Well, I am not going to make a fool of myself, or be more of a cad than I can help . . . what I want to say is this. I don't pose at being a virtuous being, not a saint, anyway. If you had held out your arms to me, I should have not let the thought of Kelmarsh stand in my way or yours. You know I have always loved you. If you had been willing to let me take you and look after you, I would have gone through fire and water if need be to make you happy. That sounds theatrical, though it's true, all the same. But I wasn't born blind. When you shrank away from me just now, I saw that I had been living in a fool's paradise. So putting all that

away, I'm going to speak pretty straight to you, Susy. Will you let me?"

He gave her a frank smile, and Susy, who, during his speech, had risen with the blood surging to her face in shame and anger, now sank down again, and put her head on her arm, which lay across the shoulder of the sofa.

"It seems to me," said Darlington, very gently, "that you have been making a fool of yourself too, Susy. You believe you hate Kelmarsh because he played the school-master too much, and didn't understand you. Really you dote upon him, and would let him trample on you if you could get back to him."

"I hate him," said Susy, lifting her head from the sofa. "I shall never go back."

"Oh yes, you will," said Darlington, firmly. "That's just what you've got to do. You ought not to have left him like that. It was a silly mistake, and I was partly to blame. I thought it would do you good to get on the boards again for a while. But I never imagined you would run away from Kelmarsh altogether, and make a tragedy of the business. Fortunately, there are no bones broken. You and Kelmarsh are a couple of children, and this will be a lesson to both of you. You will love each other all the better for it, I dare say."

Susy sat up, beating the sofa on each side of her with the palms of her hands.

"How *can* I go back?" she said. "Do you want me to crawl back and beg his pardon? . . . I thought I should have your sympathy. . . . You are as hard as Dick was."

Darlington smiled rather bitterly. "Oh yes," he said. "I dare say you would like my sympathy. That is the way with women. They want a man to be sentimental, they stir up his heart, and then they turn round and call him a brute if he becomes too emotional."

He saw the quivering of the girl's lips, and he knew that his words had stung her.

"Forgive me, Susy," he said. "I am a beast to talk like that. But I want to put things straight. You must send for your husband."

Susy jumped up and went to the window. "No!" she said in a stifled voice. "No!"

"Why not?" said Darlington.

He rose from his chair, and, striding after the girl, grasped her shoulder almost roughly.

"Look here," he said. "I must have the truth. You have sent for me, and I must know what to do one way or the other. Can you swear to me that you want to get free of Richard Kelmarsh? Can you swear to that? If so, by God, I will see that you never go back."

He swung her round to him and looked into her eyes with a hungry, eager look. She faltered before him, and gave a little moan.

"Oh," she cried. "It is no use lying, I want to go back."

Then she pressed her forehead against the wall and stretched her arms out above her head.

"Phil," she said, "how can I? I've burnt my boats. I have ruined all our lives—yours and Dick's and mine."

"Let us talk common sense," said Darlington. He drew forward a stool. "Come and sit here and we'll unravel this little tangle. The first thing to do, Susy, is to put your pride in your pocket."

He spoke cheerfully. He was not a hero, but he had an Englishman's instinct for playing the game.

Susy turned towards him, but she did not get as far as the stool. She fell forward in a dead faint, and lay on the floor at Darlington's feet.

He stared at her for a moment and then rushed to the bell-rope and pulled it violently. The landlady came up with a baby in her arms, followed by the lodging-house drudge.

"Fetch a doctor," said Darlington, breathlessly, "and bring some brandy."

The landlady looked down at the prostrate girl and sniffed angrily.

"Fetch 'em yourself, young man," she said. "And next time you ring the bell remember my other lodgers, if you please. Anybody would think the 'ouse was on fire."

Darlington succeeded in reviving Susy sufficiently to get her on to the sofa. He then went out of the house, and came back with a doctor in a cab. Two hours later, when he left the lodging-house again, to catch the train back to Sheffield, he had a slip of paper in his hand which he took to the nearest telegraph office. And on that paper Susy had scrawled, in a very weak and quavery hand, a message to her husband.

"I am ill. Come to me—Susy."

Darlington copied the message on to a telegraph form, and put the slip of paper in his pocket. On the way to Sheffield he took it out again and sat staring at it, and when he folded it up at last lifted it to his lips as though it were some sacred talisman. And, indeed, it was a proof that Phil Darlington, actor, had played the game, according to his light.

XXXIX

THE journey to Manchester was an ordeal to Kelmars, during which his mind was on the rack for eight hours of agony. The man who read the *Pink 'Un* from its leading article to its advertisements in the same third-class carriage from Yeovil to Waterloo, and three commercial travellers who discussed the price of cotton and the principles of Tariff Reform from Euston to Manchester Road, did not guess that inside the brain of the traveller who sat silently in his corner staring out of the window with a white set face there was a spiritual combat more terrible in its intensity than a duel between two men with sharp knives. There was, indeed, a duel within the man's soul—one side of his nature fighting for mastery over the other. The spirit of revolt fought against the spirit of resignation, and the issue was doubtful. His thoughts beat in his brain like the jerky throbbing of the

engine which carried him to his wife. Why should he go back? Why should he go back? She had deserted him. She had flouted his love. She had broken up his home. She had ruined his life. Why should he go back to her—this vulgar girl, this ignorant, ill-tempered child, this woman of low companions? Why should he be dragged down? Why should his life be blighted? Why should he be fettered? She had abandoned him. She had gone away with Darlington. She had sinned against him. He could never forgive her—never forgive!—never forgive! He had been a fool—a fool!—a fool! There was another woman who might have loved him. He would have found peace with her. He would have been lifted up. He would have worked for her. He would have carved out a career. He would have laid his laurels at her feet. Ursula had smiled at him. She had filled him with her music. She had touched his spirit with her white fingers—the spirit he had forgotten, the soul within him, the supernatural essence that men called a soul. He had denied the soul—denied it!—denied it! He had made a god of intellect. But there was something higher—higher!—higher! Oh, curse the throbbing of the train, and those throbbing thoughts that went to the beat of the piston-rods!

He was going back to Susy. The train was taking him back to the old life, to the old quarrels, to the woman who did not understand, to the woman who had broken his life, to the woman who was jealous of his talents, who hated his career, who detested his ideals. She was ill. Perhaps she was dying. Good God! Perhaps she would be dead before he came! Yet it might be better so—for him and for her. They had made a mess of life. They would never be happy. It would be good to be free. He would have liberty—liberty!—liberty!

So the man went on, each thought thumping in his brain, giving a twist to the rack of torture. Then the other side of his spirit took up the fight.

Yes, he had been a fool. He had been a hypocrite. Susy was not alone to blame. He had tried her too hard. He had been too selfish and self-absorbed. Perhaps he

had been wrong even in his principles, even in his convictions. Life was not to be measured by a foot-rule. It was not to be looked at from one angle. He had been narrow. He had not taken a broad view. He had been too violent in his rebellion against other classes and other creeds. He had been too destructive in his theories. Perhaps religion would have been good for Susy. Perhaps he had been wrong to deny her that. In all the creeds there was an underlying faith in immortality, in hope, in resignation. Resignation—a bitter word. A word he had hated. He had believed in revolt, in divine discontent. But resignation was the patience of those who suffer, of thwarted hope, of unsatisfied desires. Religion was resignation with the present, and hope in the future. The heart of all dogma was that—patience and hope. It gave simplicity to life, and peace. Ursula was clothed in divine simplicity. She had no fretfulness. Perhaps Susy would have been better with religion. . . . He had denied her liberty, the liberty he sought for women. He had not allowed her liberty in religion. He had not allowed her liberty to work. Could there be liberty for women? Could they ever be free? Yes, he held fast to that, in spite of Ursula and Father Fletcher, in spite of his own tyranny, his tyranny with Susy, his cruelty. He had been a hypocrite—a hypocrite!—a hypocrite! Oh, curse the throbbing of the train which beat into his brain, those piston-rods that thumped upon his nerves! When would the journey finish? When would he find his way through all these tangled thoughts—a middle way—a middle way!

* * * * *

It was seven in the evening when Richard Kelmarsh knocked at the door of a small house in a narrow street of Manchester. In the road a woman in black was singing "She Wore a Wreath of Roses," in a shrill, wailing voice. To his dying day Kelmarsh could never hear the song without a shiver, and the memory of a raw evening mist clinging to him as he had stood on a doorstep with sickening heart-throbs. The door was opened by a frowsy woman with a baby in her arms. He asked whether Mrs. Kelmarsh was staying there.

"I suppose you mean Miss Sullivan?" said the woman, sulkily. "Leastways that's what she calls 'erself, though she wears a wedding-ring."

"I am her husband," said Kelmarsh.

"I am glad to 'ear it," said the woman. "She's been a fair nuisance to us, lying ill in bed when we're so busy we can't turn round."

"May I go up?" said Kelmarsh.

"You'll find her upstairs. First door to the right."

He went up the narrow stairway, dimly lighted by a flickering gas-jet in the passage. There was a smell of fried fish and onions which made a faintness come over him for a moment. Then he stood outside the door to the right and knocked softly.

He heard Susy's voice answer "Come in" very wearily. It was four weeks since he had heard her voice, and the sound of it stirred him strangely. He turned the handle of the door, and stood on the threshold, saying his wife's name again with a kind of sob.

She was lying in bed, with one arm above her head. Her face was rather white, and her eyes were bright and feverish, and her gold-red hair was loose upon the pillow. Then she saw him standing at the door, and a look of infinite joy leapt into her eyes. She sat up in bed and held her arms out to him.

"Dick!" she cried. "Dick!"

He faltered forward, and went down on his knees by the bedside and put his arms round her.

"Susy!" he said in a low voice. "My little wife."

Her head fell on his shoulder and she burst into tears. Then she clasped her arms about his neck, and kissed his lips so long and passionately that he could hardly draw his breath. His heart seemed to melt within him, and a gush of tears came to his own eyes.

"Dick!" said Susy, stroking his face, "I'm so sorry. . . . Can you forgive me? . . . I was wicked to you—so impatient—so fretful. . . . I think I must have been mad for a time."

She put her face down upon his arm, and he soothed her as if she had been a feverish child.

"It is you who must forgive," he said. "I was hard to you, and selfish. I am very sorry—and I have suffered for it."

She put her hand to his mouth. "Hush!" she said. "It was all my fault. I was very wicked." Then she fell back upon the pillow weeping again, and beating her hand upon the bed. "Oh!" she cried. "Oh! Will God ever let me off? Will He ever forgive——"

So the husband and wife wept with one another in the bedroom of the Manchester lodging-house, where the smell of fried fish and onions crept through the cracks of the door.

Kelmarsh stayed with his wife that night, and once, when she woke from a fitful sleep, he said to her—

"Have you seen Darlington while you have been away?"

"Yes," she said. "Only once, and that was yesterday. He made me send you that message. I shall always thank him for that."

Kelmarsh did not answer, and she fell asleep again.

Then he watched over her until she stirred again, and opening her eyes smiled at him, putting her arm out of bed, and pulling his head closer to her face.

"Why did you not write, Susy?" he said. "Why did you never write a line?"

She closed her eyes and her face went whiter. "I think the devil was in my heart," she said, and moaned a little.

As the grey light of morning crept through the dirty window-blinds she woke again, and said very softly—

"Are we going home to-day, Dick?"

"Yes," he said, "we will go home, Susy."

"Oh, thank God," said Susy, very quietly. "Thank God, and you, Dick."

XL

WHEN a year had passed since Richard Kelmarsh took his wife back to Brixton, the memory of their quarrel and estrangement was like a dream from which they had both awakened in the night—a rather terrible dream which had been dispelled by the light of day. Yet Kelmarsh remembered the nightmare as a solemn warning to his soul. It had shown him how easy it is for a man to break a woman's heart through sheer carelessness, and how narrow is the bridge upon which men and women walk above the gulfs of tragedy. He vowed to himself to walk more warily, and to hold his wife closer by the hand.

Kelmarsh really gained a victory over himself by holding out the hand of friendship to Phil Darlington. He never heard from Susy the full story of that interview in the lodging-house at Manchester, and he knew that his wife kept back some details of that scene. He respected her silence, and one fact was sufficient—it was Darlington who had persuaded her to send the message which had brought the husband and wife together again. Kelmarsh thanked the actor for that good service, and the two men were civil to each other, if not the warmest friends. Darlington paid occasional visits again to the small house at Brixton, but generally on a Saturday or Sunday, when Kelmarsh was at home, and, after a slight awkwardness at first, when Susy was nervous and rather silent, they were pleasant hours in the little parlour. In other ways Kelmarsh deliberately planned to give his wife companionship which should relieve the loneliness of the time when he was inevitably absent. He decided to get a maid-servant for her, so that she need not be so tied to the house, and to a continual round of domestic drudgery. By good luck Em'ly had quarrelled so fiercely with Mrs. Birch on the subject of the oldest lodger, who was getting more irritable as time went by, that she found herself one morning on the doorstep of the Bloomsbury boarding-house with a wooden trunk and a brown-paper parcel, and

four weeks' wages tied up in the corner of her handkerchief.

She arrived unexpectedly at Susy's house with swollen eyes, and had a mild attack of hysterics on the hall mat. When Kelmarsh came home, however, she had so far recovered that she had polished all the tins on the kitchen mantelshelf, and was then scrubbing out the scullery, and singing "Three Blind Mice" in a kind of ecstasy, for Susy had already hinted that, subject to her husband's consent, she would engage Em'ly as a "general" if she would promise to be good and to keep her cap on straight.

Kelmarsh consented willingly enough, and certainly no young married couple had such a devoted slave as the queer little creature who now served them, and who, after being the maid-of-all-work in a London lodging-house, was as happy in this little household as if she had been hand-maiden to Adam and Eve in paradise.

The arrangement worked out well, and on many afternoons Susy took tea on the Terrace with her husband, or had luncheon with him in town, or dinner with him in the evening at the same little restaurant in Soho where they had sat opposite each other on a memorable night before their marriage.

Susy, on her side, overcame some of her prejudices, and, not without a little heart-burning at first, decided to tolerate Eunice Johnston. Before long, indeed, she discovered that she had a real affection for this girl, whose serious nature and ardent political ideas concealed a warm heart craving for sympathy and woman's friendship. In one thing Susy did not budge. She refused to consider the suffrage question as anything but a delusion and mid-summer madness. There were times when some of her old impatience broke out again, and when her satirical words had a sting in them that made Richard wince a little. But, as a rule, she teased him on the subject with a laughing face, and he bet her sixpence and a new hat that before a year had passed she would be a convert to the new gospel of her sex.

She went so far as to read the first hundred pages of

John Stuart Mill's "Subjection of Women," without skipping ; but then her studies were seriously interrupted, and she had a good excuse for not finishing a book with which she disagreed entirely. The interruption was made by a bald-headed baby, who had Susy's tip-tilted nose and Richard's black eyes. He interrupted more strenuously than any suffragist at a political meeting, and Susy was no longer in danger of being lonely. It was her husband who now found himself somewhat neglected, and sometimes when he sat alone in his little study, while Susy and Em'ly were upstairs with Richard Kelmarsh, Junior, he had a pang or two at the thought of how completely he was put into the background by this pink baby with powerful lungs.

Yet, on the whole, Kelmarsh was not dissatisfied with his life. In the House of Commons he was building up, very slowly, but still very surely, a solid reputation. Men who had stared at him with hard eyes now came up to him and shook hands, and showed a friendly disposition to listen to his views on any subject relating to labour and social reform. He was becoming still more closely identified with the cause of women's franchise, and a book in which he had summed up the whole history of women's emancipation since the eighteenth century had been well received, and was likely to be a substantial source of profit, apart from reputation.

He felt that he had cast off his swaddling clothes, and was a larger, broader being than when he had first come to London. Democratic still in his ideals, he was no longer a fanatic and a revolutionary. He did not quarrel any more with Dunstan over the word "compromise," but realized that in politics, as in life, evolution is very slow, and that society, as well as Nature, does not take long jumps. There were times when he was the victim of despondency, like all men who have the spirit of the reformer. Once or twice during recent days he almost decided to abandon a political career and devote himself to his old work of designing. Having grown out of his narrowness, he had lost some of his strength. He admitted, perhaps too candidly, that the truth was not all on one

side. He began to be possessed by a fatal gift for a party politician—the gift of seeing two sides of a question. Sometimes when he went into the lobby he cursed himself as a hypocrite. Sometimes he sickened at the applause which greeted the obvious insincerity, the undisguised special pleading, of the party leaders in the House.

But then he pulled himself together by the thought that in active life a man is bound to take one side or the other. He must hold fast to certain general principles and follow the main drift of a great policy, though in details he may see error, and have to practise the trickery of the partisan. Richard Kelmarsh held to the general principle that the labouring classes of England have a right to a greater share of worldly happiness, and the fruits of labour. He did not abandon his party because this ideal was debased by men of dishonesty, greed, and stupid violence which, if unchecked, would lead, not to larger liberty, but to anarchy and reaction. He had been violent himself, and it was not for him to blame men who were more consistent to the creed of revolution. He felt indeed a little shame that his fighting spirit was being weakened by the gradual casting off of old prejudices and passions. After all, intensity of conviction, blind and unswerving adherence to a narrow faith, give a man power and intellectual happiness.

Dunstan, his leader, was pleased with him. "If you go on like this, and don't lose patience, we will see you one of these days in a cocked hat and gold-laced trousers like Johnny Burns when he goes to the Buckingham Palace of Varieties."

"God forbid!" said Kelmarsh.

"If you mean the cocked hat, why certainly," said Dunstan, "but not the power that goes along with it. I wouldn't be too proud to put on frills myself, if I could be President of the Local Government Board for a couple of years."

"Well, it is your turn next," said Kelmarsh, smiling, but quite sincere in his words. "You have done more for the people than any of the party."

Dunstan shook his head. "They'll never put me into office, and don't you forget it. They like to 'ear me talk to 'em. I give 'em 'eart throbs, and nice little emotions after dinner, but I'm too dangerous. They don't think I should ever get the official type of mind, and between ourselves I think they're right. Now, you, my boy, would take to a Government office like second nature. You've got reserve. There's always something at the back of your brain which doesn't come out of your mouth. And you look uncommonly well in a frock coat. Of course, you ain't going to get into the Ministry this side of Christmas, but you're young, and you can afford to wait ten years or so. Then I'll take off my 'at to you, and I dare say you'll be too proud to come to breakfast in Union Street."

Curiously enough, Basil Chilvers said very much the same thing to Kelmarsh in a different way. He made a sporting bet that if Kelmarsh played his cards well he held a winning hand.

"You've got a cool head," he said; "and you have already won the respect of the House. I flatter myself, perhaps foolishly, that you owe a little to my profound wisdom."

Kelmarsh was not inclined to contradict him. He acknowledged to himself that Chilvers had been an influence in his education and career. When he came back with his wife from Manchester he had avoided Chilvers for a while. The remembrance of his episode in the country with Ursula gave him a curious feeling of embarrassment and uneasiness. But Chilvers, in his easy unaffected way, smoothed over anything like an awkward situation. Kelmarsh could never tell how much he knew or guessed. Certainly Ursula had told her cousin something about his behaviour at Bower Chilvers, which must have seemed to her strange and unaccountable. But Chilvers passed it off with a word or two.

"Ursula tells me you are a married man," he said. "I am so glad, my dear fellow. I hope very much you will introduce me to Mrs. Richard Kelmarsh."

The introduction took place on the Terrace of the House

of Commons. Susy was in a muslin frock, and looked very pretty and simple. Chilvers was attentive to her, and exerted himself to put her at her ease, and to keep her smiling. She found him delightful, and Kelmarsh was rather surprised and wholly pleased at the way in which his wife fell into the mood of the young Tory, and answered his banter in unembarrassed gaiety. There seemed to be some kind of freemasonry between them, and he wondered how it was that he could not "frivol" in such a light-hearted and irresponsible fashion. It was a curse to be born serious.

Afterwards Chilvers came up to him and took his arm. "If it is permissible to congratulate a man on his wife I should like to do so," he said. "I find Mrs. Richard Kelmarsh entirely charming."

Kelmarsh flushed with pleasure, and he felt a new pride in the possession of Susy.

It was not many days after this that Kelmarsh met Ursula again. She was with Basil Chilvers in the Strangers' Lobby, looking very cool and fragrant in a simple white frock with a black hat. Kelmarsh came face to face with her, and she held out her hand at once without a sign of embarrassment.

"Are you speaking to-day?" she asked, with a smile. "I have come up like a country cousin to hear the lions roar."

"No," said Kelmarsh. "I have one or two questions down. That is all."

"Quite enough too," said Chilvers. "It needs a lot of pluck to heckle a minister. But you Labour men are masters of that game."

"Run away and play, Basil," said Ursula. "I want Mr. Kelmarsh to show me Westminster Hall. I am sure he knows the history of every great scene that has taken place in it since Edward the Confessor. Your knowledge of history would disgrace a schoolboy."

Chilvers laughed. "Kelmarsh can only give you ten minutes," he said. "If you keep him longer he will be too late to ask his inquisitive questions. Besides, you are taking his consent for granted."

"Oh," said Kelmarsh, a little awkwardly, "I shall be very pleased."

He walked with Ursula into the great hall, and did his best to summon up the spirit of the place, recalling some of its old memories. The girl at his side listened with a pretty air of reverence, and he was surprised to find himself so much at his ease with her. She did not keep him more than the ten minutes, and thanked him for his interesting descriptions which wild horses, she said, could never have dragged from her lackadaisical cousin. When she said good-bye, she let her hand rest in his for a moment.

"I want you to bring your wife to see me," she said. "Basil is enchanted with her."

She made him promise to take Susy to tea on the following Sunday, and he was grateful to her. It was the beginning of a very pleasant friendship for his wife; for Ursula was also delighted with Susy's simplicity and unconventional conversation. Afterwards, she came several times to the small house at Brixton, sometimes with Basil, but generally alone. She played the fairy god-mother to little Dick, whom she took to her heart at once, and many toys came addressed to Master Kelmarsh, which he broke to bits with the fierce joy of an iconoclast. Once when Ursula came, Eunice Johnston was there also, and with Susy they had a gay time with little Dick in his bath upstairs.

Kelmarsh, sitting in his study during this domestic drama, hearing from afar the laughter of three women's voices and the shouts of his infant son, dropped down his pen and sat staring through the open window into the little backyard where baby-clothes were hanging out to dry. He fell into a kind of day-dream, in which three woman's faces appeared. Susy, Eunice, and Ursula—one by one they had come into his life with the mysterious influence of womanhood upon the spiritual nature of a man. To each of them he owed something, to each of them a debt of gratitude which he could only repay by reverence. He had known few women before these three, and with a deep emotion which was strange to him, he thanked God

that in the beginning of his manhood he had been saved from many dangers by the knowledge of such good women as those now laughing round the wash-tub of the boy upstairs.

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